*Week ending April 11 1953*
*Every Wednesday Fourpence*

# JOHN BULL

## "THE FIVE TOWNS"

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*...more and more men say*

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The little cigar with the BIG reputation

3 for 1/10d. · 6 for 3/7½d.

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# *MARY'S Mystery Men*

*Mary never invited her boy friends in. "Why?" I said. "Because home's so dull," she told me.*

*"Aha!" I exclaimed, "you wait and see," because I knew the very thing to* tempt them home.

IT'S GRAND TO MEET YOU AT LAST MRS. LYNE
THIS IS THE NICEST WAY TO END AN EVENING
HAVE ANOTHER CUP, BILL ?
THIS DRINKING CHOCOLATE IS SUPER

*Cadbury's to round off the evening. Rich, sweet, smooth, Cadbury's Drinking Chocolate. Real chocolate, just like you used to get.* AND, IT'S SO EASY TO MAKE— I'LL NEVER BE WITHOUT IT AGAIN.

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## EDITORIAL

# *Are they open?*

THE saddest phrase in the English language is said to be "Time, gentlemen, please." And there is continual agitation to increase the licensing hours or even do away with them, particularly in this pre-Coronation time.

According to the British Travel and Holidays Association, the licensing regulations "provide a constant source of criticism by overseas visitors."

COMPLETE "freedom" in this matter might please some visitors and those Englishmen who want to return to the days when the pubs were open from six in the morning until half-past midnight. They miss the point.

What the discerning tourist wants is to meet the British as they *are*, not as the French or Spaniards are. And what the sensible citizen wants is a policy of reasonable hours —and no humbug.

MR. PERCEY
*Against longer hours*

MR. LEONARD PERCEY, secretary of the Licensed Victuallers' Defence League, says: "Any attempt to extend the hours and thus make our locals mere imitations of Continental cafés would not please foreign visitors. It would displease most of our present customers. Real and permanent improvement of licensed houses can come only by progress along traditional lines."

English pubs are already open eight or nine hours every day and the staff has to work both before and after opening times. The Catering Wages Act insists on a limit, which might mean that a publican would have to pay a barman £1 overtime to sell a pint of beer.

But the thirsty Englishman is not so badly off.

In Sweden hard liquor is rationed to three litres a month per man and two per woman. If a woman marries she loses her ration. In Norway spirits can't be drunk in public on Saturdays or Sundays. And 25,000,000 U.S. citizens live in districts that forbid the sale of spirits.

BRITONS *can* grumble, however, at the muddle in closing times. In many districts it is still illegal to drink on one side of the road after 10.30, but permissible on the other.

There is strong cause for complaint, too, in the humbug which attaches to buying a drink on Sunday in Wales and Scotland. Everyone knows that the "travellers only" rule in Scotland and the "no one at all" rule in Wales are being flouted.

If these inconsistencies can be eliminated, we in this country can be reasonably satisfied with licence, rather than "freedom," in buying a drink.

## THIS WEEK'S COVER

DOUGLAS MAYS'S new scholar may not always relish the thought of school, but today he's a far cry from Shakespeare's "whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school." Mays got his cover idea when a friend found her son asleep in bed in his first school cap. "Children are always amusing," says Mays, who has four of them—all daughters, "when they don't know they are being watched."

Since I've had my new gas cooker...

I'm using far less gas

Good News! The NEW gas cookers show a profit. 3 therms of gas now do the work that needed 5 therms in many of the older models. They grill and boil faster, oven-cook to perfection and clean easily. Exchange is no robbery — especially when an old cooker is replaced by one of the modern type using less gas. It will be the pride and joy of your kitchen, and give you more leisure for pleasure. Then you'll be saving money by saving gas, and what's more, saving the nation's precious fuel.

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**Get Amplex Chlorophyll Tablets today. 6d., 1/9 and 5/3**

No more Indigestion

*— says this Liverpool woman.*

"I used to dread eating", writes Mrs. E. M. of Liverpool. "I was unable to enjoy a meal without suffering agonies with indigestion. I decided to try Bismag . . . I now look forward to meals knowing that one Bismag tablet will prevent all pain and discomfort afterwards."

'Bismag' contains some of the quickest-acting ingredients known for neutralising stomach acid. That is why millions of sufferers all over the world — in 45 different countries — depend on this scientifically balanced antacid prescription in cases of indigestion, flatulence, heartburn and pain after meals. For quicker, surer relief ask your chemist for 'Bismag' ('Bisurated' Magnesia)—75 tablets—1/9d.

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JEYES' *rapid, safe remedy for head pest infestation*

**MOTHER** – Even the cleanest child can unwittingly pick up head lice, but do not reproach yourself or worry about it. Suleo Hair Emulsion is a safe, easily applied remedy: pleasant and undetectable.

# FREE SPEECH

## A shop that spoilt local traditions

UNTIL RECENTLY, our little village store had been in the hands of the same family for three generations. Then, the latest owner sold the goodwill to a firm in a nearby town, and retired.

The old shop was closed and a new one built opposite. The first time I visited it I noted the chromium, the glass and the fluorescent lighting—and I waited to be served. To my surprise, I realized I was expected to help myself and pay at the door. All this may be more efficient, but with the passing of our crowded, dimly lit shop and the pleasant chatter of the owner as he served me, something seems to have gone from the life of our village.—MISS A. L., Shropshire.

### *Seeds Of Doubt*

YOUR correspondent who bought a sixpenny packet of zinnia seeds ("Free Speech," March 21) can be fairly sure he will get twelve good plants. The 350 seeds he saved from his plant are probably unripe and inferior in quality. I suggest he sows twelve seeds of his own alongside the twelve bought seeds—and in due course reports the result in "Free Speech."—J. B., Sale.

### *Progress Chaser*

I AM married to an industrial efficiency expert. Trying to live up to his professional standards, I pride myself on an organized household. Meals are served with clockwork precision, shopping is done at slack times, dentists' appointments are

arranged months ahead. I knit woollies in the summer, leave serious reading for the winter. The medicine chest is always well stocked. All jars and bottles in the pantry are labelled. Thinking I wasn't doing so badly, I asked my husband what he liked least about me. "Your charming muddle-headedness, my dear," was his shattering reply.—MRS. H. R., Doncaster.

### *Air Mail Mystery*

A LETTER sent by air mail from Britain to South Africa costs 1s. 3d. In the reverse direction the charge is 9d. The same planes carry the letters, presumably at the same cost.—HUGH STOKER, Bridport, Dorset.

### *1-2-Xposed*

FOR years I have made a mathematical study of football pools, and your Editorial, "£ s. d. of 1-2-X" (JOHN BULL, March 14), made me wonder how many pools fans realize the odds against getting eight draws correct out of fifty-four results. If only eight games are drawn, the odds are 1 in 173,410,965. This is equivalent to meeting a given eight people out of more than three times Great Britain's population! Where nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen games are drawn, the chances are 9, 45, 165, 495, 1,287 and 3,003 in 173,410,965 respectively.—G. MCKINNIE, Falkirk.

### *Entrance Fee*

I HOPE to spend my summer holiday in London this June, and I was looking forward to visiting Westminster Abbey to pray—probably the only time I shall have the opportunity. But it has now been announced that, for a month after the Coronation, visitors will only be admitted for a fee, to view the ceremonial setting. I always thought anyone could enter a church without hindrance to pray. —MRS. A. H., Carlisle, Northumberland.

*Generally speaking, this is true. But Westminster Abbey, the collegiate Church of St. Peter, is not governed in the same way as most cathedrals and churches. Like St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and the Chapel Royal, St. James's, it is designated "Royal Peculiar." Under a charter granted by Queen Elizabeth I, it is administered by the dean and chapter, under the personal jurisdiction of the Sovereign, who is known as The Visitor.*

### *Dialect Dies Hard*

LANCASHIRE takes some beating for picturesque dialect. For example, what would Miss Joan Wright ("Free Speech," March 7) make of "edge o' dark"? It means twilight.—HAROLD HOWARTH, Conway Avenue, Whitefield, Manchester.

. . . Cheshire folk will say "clemmed to death" for hungry, "gone" for sad, "jaded" for ill.—A. B., Northwich, Cheshire.

. . . Here is some broad Yorkshire. "Sithee" means "Look here"; a "fratch" is a quarrel; "bodder," a handyman; "a tuthra," a few; a "maungy hawporth," a spoilt child. —MISS L. SCHOFIELD, Sweet Oak, Triangle, Halifax, Yorkshire.

### *Captive Commandos*

BRIGADIER SLATER'S second instalment of "Commando!" (JOHN BULL, March 14) particularly interested me because Corporal Dumper and Gunner McGoldrick were brought from Guernsey to the prison camp I was in, at St. Lo. At first they were kept in solitary confinement, but after I made representations to the Germans, they were allowed to join the rest of us. The Guernsey raid upset the Germans so much that they were inclined to treat the two men as spies.—T. MULLEN COWBAN, Millom, Cumberland.

*This week's instalment of "Commando!" begins on page 20.*

IN JOHN BULL NEXT WEEK

**FORGOTTEN PEOPLE**

**Beginning a fascinating story of stone-age life in unexplored New Guinea**

*See Page 23*

### *Lourdes Character*

IN his excellent article on Lourdes (JOHN BULL, March 14), Dennis Holman mentioned the old gentleman who leads the "Children of Mary" in the afternoon procession. While I was in Lourdes in July, I persuaded him to pose for his photograph — one of the few he has allowed to be taken.—MISS E. LENNOX, Stanhope Gardens, London, S.W.7.

*Dennis Holman wrote of the "imperiously moustached little man in a blue-and-silver uniform" carrying a staff, who kept the 'Children of Mary' in order.*

### *Right After All*

COLLEGE OF ARMS INEXCUSABLY WRONG ("Free Speech," March 21). SUGGEST CONSULT LORD LYON KING OF ARMS, EDINBURGH, KINGDOM OF SCOTLAND, RE SCOTTISH ROYAL ARMS.—ROSS, GLASGOW.

*Due to a misunderstanding, the College of Arms looked up English Royal coats of arms for several reigns, before stating that the arms displayed at Ballater had the supporters reversed. Scotland's Royal coat of arms does, in fact, have the unicorn on the left of the shield. The design of the shield itself is also different.*

### *Fire Engines First*

SINCE 1932, Hull has controlled traffic to give fire engines priority, in much the same way as Finland's system mentioned by H. V. M., of Richmond ("Free Speech," March 7). Along the route followed by the fire engine, all traffic lights turn red, illuminated signs indicate: "Stop. Fire engine coming," and warning bells ring.—W. A. D., Hull, Yorkshire.

. . . Sunderland has a similar system. Traffic lights change to red, and an alarm bell warns traffic to keep to the side of the road.—WILLIAM H. HIRST, Sea Road, Fulwell, Sunderland.

*"Many towns have schemes like Hull's," says the Ministry of Transport. "Often the control is confined to one or two sets of traffic lights."*

### *Outsize Classes*

AS A teacher in an infants' school, I find it impossible to give my forty-nine pupils the attention they need. If I help the more backward children with their sums, the others do not get the guidance they, too, must have. In a reading lesson, I try to hear five groups read. The others have to do written work—which I could help them with. How can we cope with illiteracy, if a child does not have a fair chance at the start? It is in the infant school that smaller classes are most urgently needed.—MISS N. D. J., Liverpool.

**Letters intended for publication should be as brief as possible and include the sender's full name and address. John Bull pays a guinea for every letter printed. Readers with personal problems should send inquiries (other than medical) to John Bull Free Advice Service with a stamped addressed envelope for reply.**

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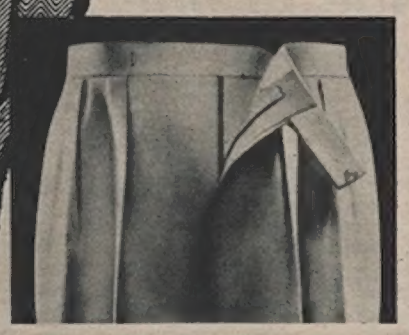

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ICI

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Kitchener Ridgeway, the Crown Staffordshire fireman, attends the biscuit oven. For forty-eight hours at a time he cannot leave it

The hands that can make flowers from bits of clay: Mrs. Bell at work. Most of the time, it is roses, anemones, carnations

# JOURNEY INTO BRITAIN

## *Harry Hopkins reports from*

# THE FIVE TOWNS

**A great new series begins in the Potteries—where the pride of a people still confounds theory, and the smoke and grime are reluctantly clearing before a second industrial revolution**

THE FLOCKS OF BUYERS and other pilgrims from America, South Africa, Australia and other foreign parts—whose regular arrival in Stoke-on-Trent marks the procession of the seasons—emerge from the station to confront a statue of Josiah Wedgwood nursing a vase, the commodious Elizabethan-style façade of the North Stafford Hotel and the square bulk of Federation House, headquarters of the pottery manufacturers' associations.

These features are thoughtfully arranged in orderly succession, and the new arrivals cling to them gratefully—almost the last visible signs of order they are to experience for some days.

At the beginning of the war a certain flyer was instructed to make an air survey of the Stoke-on-Trent blackout. He was having a drink afterwards in the Meir airfield bar when approached and questioned by the local citizens. Well, he said, there was a light from the pottery kilns, some flickering from the pit-heads, and a positive glow from the smouldering slagheaps. "But," he reassured them, "you have no need to worry. You'll never be

Pikelets are an important part of a weekend in the Five Towns, and here Dan Williams and his wife show the expert's way of making them

JOHN BULL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARTHUR WHITTINGTON

Arnold Bennett's plaque in Hope Street. The Five Towns take the view that, if Bennett made them famous, they did about as much for him

The old and the new: modern extension to a nineteenth-century factory. Against such changes, the last-ditchers have taken their stand in vain

bombed. In the first place, no bomber pilot will ever see through the smoke. In the second place, even if he does, he's bound to think the place has already been bombed."

I repeated this story, proudly related to me by one Potteries citizen, to another, who immediately capped it. He had, he said, been serving in a North Staffordshire anti-aircraft unit in Germany when they came across a Luftwaffe magazine containing an aerial photograph which they identified, with some excitement, as the centre of Hanley. The caption read: "The city the Luftwaffe will never bomb. As you see, the British capitalists have wrecked it already. . . ."

Variously described to me as "a sausage," "an elongated stain" and "blobs on a piece of string," this remarkable agglomeration of 275,000 people, seventeen railway stations, thirteen coalpits and two or three hundred "pot-banks" straggles along the twisting and much-faulted North Staffordshire coal strata.

## The Theory—And The Fact

Theoretically, since federation in 1910, this is the City of Stoke-on-Trent, the twelfth largest town in Britain. In fact, recognizably and triumphantly, it is the Five Towns of Arnold Bennett, strung together by the red buses of the Potteries Motor Traction, the "main line" from Longton (otherwise "Neck-end") in the south to Tunstall at the northern extremity.

Each of the towns, administratively non-existent, has its town hall, its park, its parish church with its high square tower, its cemetery, its railway station, its public lavatories—and its pride. Particularly its pride. Burslem, which is the oldest of the towns, and was the last to go Labour, has perhaps a double share of pride. It certainly has two town halls, the second or "new town hall" being a magnificent last-ditch gesture of the anti-federationists who—any town hall at all having become superfluous—thus blew the old town's surplus funds rather than allow them to fall into the vulgar hands of *nouveau riche* Hanley.

It is a region of hills and of vistas—unvarying vistas of crowding smoke-veiled rooftops and pit-heads, flooded marl-pits and scraggy brown fields, punctuated by vast conical slag-heaps (which can no longer be passed off as mountains since neatly geometric mechanical piling came in).

But the shape that dominates the landscape is the squat, stolid, rather eerie shape of the kilns, intruding everywhere, like groups of great brick flagons, their serried bottlenecks crushed up against the houses, brooding over the streets, popping up like genii behind town halls and church towers, sending their streams of thick black smoke across the housetops like destroyers under full steam.

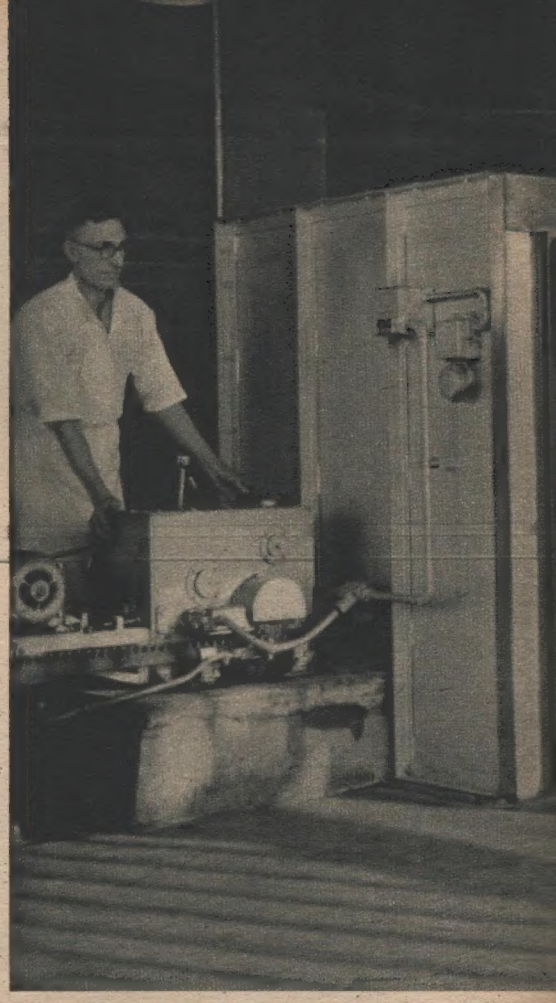
## Disappearing Town Hall

A good many of the pot-banks *are*, in fact, houses—or grew out of houses. For in the Five Towns it is almost a first principle that no building should be used for the purpose for which it was designed. Hanley's town hall was built as an hotel. Longton's town hall, shored up with girders, but nevertheless progressively disappearing into the ground with a complicated sinking and sliding motion, now serves as a market.

A British School of 1818, which later became the Rating Office, is now the main Hanley library, where readers, entering, confront a forbidding list of by-laws, flanked by notices announcing No Dogs Allowed and No Perambulators Beyond This Point.

The citizens of Stoke-on-Trent, who are unburdened by either false pride or false modesty, would not attempt to maintain that their city is a monument to the dignity of Man. It has, however, they never fail to point out, one surpassing advantage: east or west, you are almost instantly out of it—and in fine country.

Almost in the geographical centre of Stoke lies a dairy farm—where the farmer finds it necessary to write to the *Sentinel* imploring readers



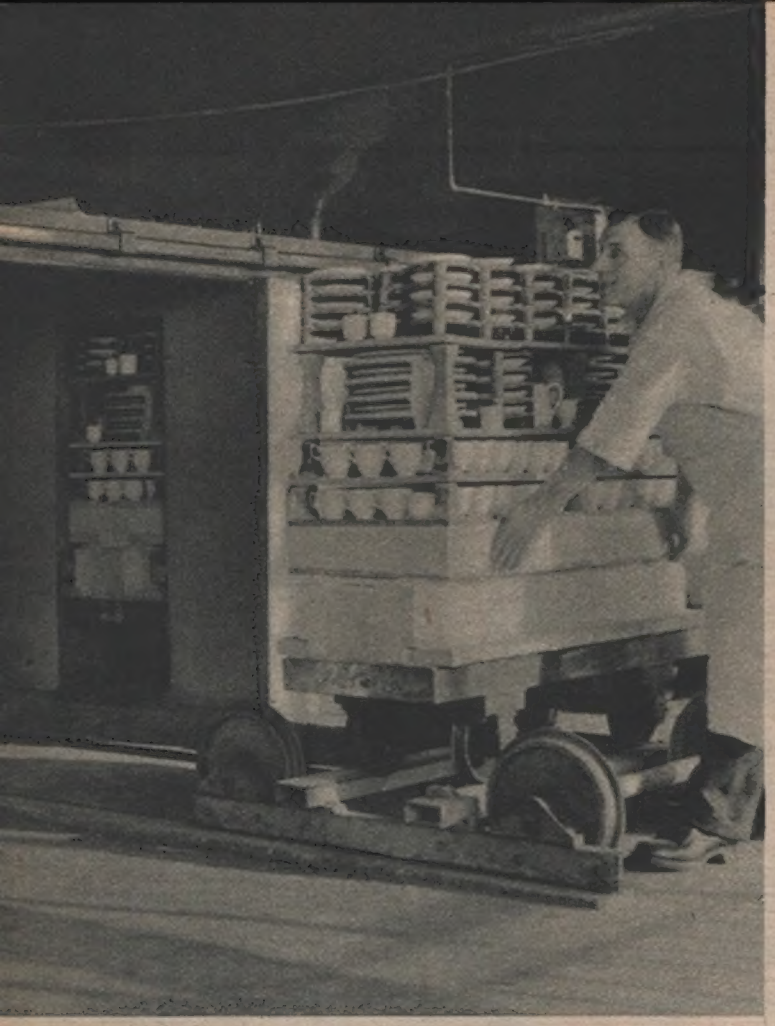
One of the latest electric "Tunnel" ovens

to try to distinguish between his growing corn and the public park. And the local town planner (poor fellow) has, in fact, calculated that no less than one half of the city's area is agricultural land.

The truth is that, grime apart, this part of our British workshop escaped the full rigour of the Industrial Revolution. The "dark satanic mills" devoured the countryside and covered it with miles of barrack-like bricks and mortar; by comparison, the pot-banks merely nibbled at it. Black as their smoke was, it was not the gritty, corrosive smoke of Lancashire, but warmer, richer stuff.

Five Towns folk, indeed, are proud of their smoke. For years the shops here have displayed a series of "dirty Stoke postcards" showing their

The Six Towns of Stoke-on-Trent. Fenton is the one that Arnold Bennett had "forgotten"



If this is their tomorrow, the Potteries are not bound to like it

Frank and Samuel Green, fourth generation of the Crown Staffordshire family

city in almost total eclipse as black clouds pour from the hundreds of ovens and chimneys. These postcards are best-sellers. With the legend "With Greetings and Best Wishes" they are dispatched to the ends of the earth.

In this, probably, the Five Towns' instinct is sound. For under the shelter of this dense canopy there has survived here a certain cosiness, a human warmth, a gentleness, a loyalty to old ways and old standards that elsewhere have been swept away. Even employers here will tell you that, whatever may happen elsewhere, in the Five Towns you will still get a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. It is notable, too, that though the area is full of immigrants from Ireland and Wales, there are no Irish or Welsh quarters as there are in other places. The Welsh and the Irish, under that deep coating of smoke, have become Five Towns' folk like the rest; and now a new wave of immigrants from Europe—Poles and Ukrainians and Latvians—are falling under the same smoky spell.

Fenton is The Town That Arnold Bennett Forgot. (The word "five," he explained characteristically, contains an open vowel; "six" does not.) Yet Fenton, for all that, continues to exist, complete with park, town hall, cemetery and pride.

In their little oatcake and pikelet shop in the long main street that connects Fenton with Stoke on one side and with Longton on the other, Dan Williams and his wife are getting ready—as they have been these last twenty-four years—for the weekend rush. For pikelets, which look like a cross between a cockney crumpet and an Indian *chapatti*, are an important part of a Five Towns weekend. Williams and his wife will be out of bed at one o'clock on Sunday morning, turning out hundreds of oatcakes and pikelets on the big gas-heated hotplate that fills the centre of the shop, piling them up in high brown piles in the window.

"There's many round here as would sooner go without their breakfast on Sunday morning as miss their pikelets," says Mrs. Williams. The light gleams on Dan Williams's spectacles as he stands at the back of the shop. "Why," he says, "there are six pikelet shops just round these few streets alone. Friend of ours thought of opening up one in London, but I reckon it wouldn't have done. You'd need to use up too much capital before you got those London folk to understand. . . ."

Dick Billington (left) walks in the Wedgwood grounds with his apprentice. He is one of the "big handlers," as distinct from "cup handlers," who are girls

## Inimitable In The World

A lorry lumbers by, its side streaked with white—the white of china clay, the mark of the Five Towns. In its back lies a load of cow-bones from the Argentine on their way to the china and earthenware millers, just down the road. For Longton, the smokiest of the towns, and Fenton, its neighbour, are mighty producers of china tea-things—that English bone china, translucent, hard, fine and white, which is so far inimitable in the world. And bone china, oddly enough, contains bone, as much as fifty per cent bone, the crushed bone of any cloven-hoofed animal—cows for preference, but on no account horses, whose bones contain iron, speckling the china with blobs of brown.

"Change?" says Dan Williams, who used to be a tile-maker. "No, I don't reckon there's been much change round here. . . ." The pot-banks hem in the little shop as they hem in the whole life of the Five Towns. To one side, the ground falls away in another of those smoke-wreathed vistas; on the other, across the street, rise—a full-bellied Falstaffian group—the bottle-neck kilns of the pot-factory which to buyers all the world over is "Crown Staffordshire," but which to the locals is simply known as "Greens." When Dan Williams played in the

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# Exit Miss Robinson

*by* ***WILL SCOTT***

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN PIMLOTT, R.I.

**There was only one man in the town who knew the truth about her. And today he was coming to tea**

FOR OVER A YEAR nobody took any notice of her. It is that kind of suburb if you want to keep yourself to yourself, and Miss Robinson did. She had no visitors and she seemed to want no friends. There was a companion, Miss Fitch, and she appeared to be enough.

About the only time the two of them were ever seen was around half-past eleven each morning when they did their quiet shopping. And even then they weren't really seen, because nobody was looking. As a sort of daily treat they always ended up by taking coffee at the Copper Kettle, but unobtrusively in a quiet corner near the window, where they could watch other shoppers and holidaymakers in the summer season and the green buses turning round opposite the post office to go back down into the town.

It had got about in a vague sort of way that Miss Robinson had been connected with the stage in her younger days. But that created no excitement. Ex-actresses, half a century or so past their heyday, are not exactly news, unless they spectacularly do or are done by, get themselves married or murdered.

Then one day Miss Fitch, the companion, fell ill and had to go into the local hospital for three weeks. Miss Robinson, unable to cope, called in a daily help, and the daily help had a long nose. Perhaps it was Miss Robinson's own fault for leaving the old photographs and the faded programmes where they could be seen. But it was certainly the daily help's fault for talking.

The news got round in no time that Miss Robinson had once been Sylvia Patten, Edwardian star of *Merry Miss Maud* at the Craven Theatre in 1908.

Nobody could remember anything about *Merry Miss Maud* and the name of Sylvia Patten struck only the dimmest of chords. But they didn't say so. After all, a star's a star. The suburb began to smile pleasantly and raise its hat.

Old-timers liked to say to visiting old-timers in the summer season: "You remember Sylvia Patten in *Merry Miss Maud*? The Craven Theatre in 1908. She lives just round the corner. Oh yes, I know her very well indeed. She's awfully *sweet*."

And the visiting old-timers would try to look as wise as the local old-timers were trying to look. *Merry Miss Maud*. . . ? Well no, they didn't actually see it at the time. But they remembered it, naturally.

The editor of the local *Advertiser* tried to work up an interview for the London papers, but nothing came of it. When all you can say is that a one-time musical comedy star lives in your little town, you haven't got much to say that will interest the wide world. The editor gave it up.

He didn't know that after his feeble attempt Miss Robinson, with a look on her face that might well have made news, got out her old photographs and her old programmes and her old press-cuttings again. She also got out a very old and very tattered magazine, and opened it at a page with the words:

"*. . . when she walked out of the cast of 'Merry Miss Maud,' for reasons which have never been disclosed, and thus ended a career which was full of the brightest promise, Miss Sylvia Patten, who never returned to the stage after that unexplained night. . . .*"

This time she was careful to lock her souvenirs away when she had done with them.

What with one thing and another, when Miss Fitch, the companion, came back to the bungalow and the half-past eleven shopping was resumed, Miss Robinson, to her surprise, was all at once able to queen it in a small way. The corner seat of the Copper Kettle was now more like a throne.

The suburb became quite proud of her. She was asked to open garden fêtes, and they even tried to make her president of the Women's Institute. She made the best speeches the place had ever heard.

But she always made them as Miss Robinson. On that she insisted. "When I left the old days behind, I left them behind," she said. "I'm just an ordinary person now, like everybody else." And though they tried very hard, they could never get her to have anything to do with the local dramatic society. Most charmingly she explained, "I finished with things like that a long time ago. I'm just somebody in the audience now."

IT was in the lounge of the County Hotel down in the town that the editor of the local *Advertiser* first met old Percy Instone, who was taking his holiday early. There was a television set in the lounge, and old Percy was being gently sorry for the new generation who, having so much, would never know the best.

"You're right there," said the editor, whose technique it was always to offer cues right and left, since you never knew what they might lead to. "The good old Edwardian days!" (He was guessing old Percy at sixty-five.) "It was the *spirit*. They'll never televise that. *The Merry Widow*, for instance."

Old Percy said "Ah!" and nodded sadly.

"Did you ever see," asked the editor, "*Merry Miss Maud* at the Craven? Sylvia Patten."

Old Percy's eyebrows came down and rested on the tops of his glasses. "Yes, I did," he said at last.

"I never meet anybody who remembers," said the editor. "I wouldn't, of course, in a little place like this. But still, it was such a hit."

"It wasn't," said old Percy unexpectedly. "It came off very suddenly. But," he added abruptly, "how do you happen to remember?"

"I don't," said the editor. "But, you see, she lives here—Sylvia Patten."

Old Percy gave a jerk as if somebody had pulled a string.

"Sylvia Patten lives *here*?"

"In the town. She has a little bungalow in Belville, not far from the cliff."

Old Percy's eyebrows had gone up from the tops of his glasses, and his mouth wasn't quite closed.

"Oh yes, quite the star turn," the editor

Miss Robinson came to the point. "You wanted

to see me alone?" she prompted. "Oh, yes," said Percy quickly. He fumbled for words to begin

said, warming up. "Opens things and makes speeches. She uses her own name now—Miss Robinson. It's a bit pathetic, really. I mean, nobody remembers, and she was so famous."

Old Percy Instone said he had been at the first night of *Merry Miss Maud*. Then he said he would very much like to meet a star of his young days.

The editor said it would be easy.

And it was. The very next morning, in the Copper Kettle, old Percy was introduced to Miss Robinson as "one of your old admirers, who used to be at your first nights."

It was all very polite and formal. Miss Robinson was gracious and full of charm, and she had quite a way with her when she cared to try. She cared to try very hard this morning and she had so much to say that nobody but Miss Fitch appeared to notice that old Percy said hardly anything at all.

Miss Robinson spoke of theatres long since pulled down or wrecked by war, of once-popular actors and actresses who had left not even a name behind them, of nights when Royalty came to the play. To most of this old Percy responded only with gentle smiles and nods.

"And you were really at the first night of *Merry Miss Maud?*" Miss Robinson asked.

"I think I could show you the very seat I occupied," said old Percy. After which, like one who fears that he has monopolized the conversation for too long, he sat back and put the tips of his fingers together.

When the little court broke up a few minutes later, she said, "We shall meet again, I hope."

"I sincerely trust so," said Old Percy.

That evening, in the County Hotel, he began to write a letter. He began three times. When he had torn up the last attempt he went out for a walk.

It was some time before old Percy and the editor of the *Advertiser* met again. The old man was waiting for the Belville bus.

"You're making a long holiday of it," said the editor.

"My time's my own," said old Percy, "and I am able to live where I like."

"Have you seen any more of the famous actress?"

"As a matter of fact," said old Percy, "I have. Once or twice. I've taken rather a fancy to the Copper Kettle." He added, as if it didn't really matter, "Is that other one *always* there?"

"Miss Fitch?" said the editor. "She's the companion. Yes, they always seem to be together. A dull old stick."

As Percy boarded his bus the editor thought: the old boy ought to marry her. There'd be a story in that. A *London* story.

One morning, Miss Robinson received a letter which disturbed her but did not altogether surprise her.

"Dear Miss Robinson:

I wonder if I might be permitted to see you alone one afternoon very shortly? I write since I cannot ask, because whenever we meet you are, quite understandably, always surrounded by admirers. And you know what crowds are. I feel that if we could shut out, if only for a little while, the present day and everybody in it, we should have many memories of a satisfying day to occupy ourselves with. Mind, when I say alone I mean *alone*. Though that isn't a very Edwardian way of putting it, is it?

I will venture to subscribe myself,
Your veteran friend,
Percy Instone."

Miss Robinson read the letter again, suddenly thankful that Miss Fitch was occupied elsewhere in the bungalow. She didn't feel like talking.

A third time she read the letter, then she put it away in her little writing desk and took out the tattered magazine. Once more she read the words:

*". . . when she walked out of the cast of 'Merry Miss Maud,' for reasons which have never been disclosed, and thus ended a career which was full of the brightest promise, Miss Sylvia Patten, who never returned to the stage after that unexplained night. . . ."*

At last she swept everything back into the desk and locked it carefully.

Oh, well, she thought, giving a little sigh which said that everything comes to an end, and we all know it. Then she got pen, ink and paper and wrote her reply. She suggested teatime on Thursday afternoon. She would be alone.

There wasn't a lot of assurance about Mr. Instone when he called at the bungalow on Thursday afternoon. He had never had very much to say in the Copper Kettle, but now he appeared to have nothing. He seemed very grateful for such straws as the garden and the weather and, when at last he saw it—the silver-framed photograph on the piano.

"You?" he said.

"In *Merry Miss Maud*," she answered. "Forty-four years ago. Perhaps that is why you have to ask."

"Forgive me," he said. "I must sound very discourteous. A very bad start—which is the last thing I intended." He turned and looked at the photograph again. "Very, very charming." Then he shook his head. "You know, my dear Miss Robinson, it is all far too long ago. Or am I being discourteous again?"

"And yet," she said, ignoring the question, "it is all still here, in a sense. So long as we are here."

"I know what you mean," said Mr. Instone. "The trouble with us old-timers is that there

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# The women behind Mrs. Dale's Diary

*by DON EVERITT*

**Radio's greatest star is a split personality. One half is a gay and robust actress who has become a family legend. The other is the team of women who bring her convincingly to life**

JUST BEFORE FOUR THIRTY one weekday afternoon, Mrs. Freeman, mother of Mrs. Dale, the B.B.C.'s Light Programme diarist, ran out of her daughter's house and into the path of a car. She was knocked down and badly injured. Within minutes of the episode ending, people began to telephone Broadcasting House to ask how she was. Special staff had to be put on to the switchboard. Telegrams poured in—some reply paid. One man asked for a bulletin to be given in the nine o'clock news. For several days the hubbub continued with letters and cakes and flowers for the injured woman.

"Thousands of people believe that the characters in the diary really exist," says gay and robust Ellis Powell, who plays the title rôle in the B.B.C.'s non-stop saga, *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. "They think the scriptwriters are merely note-takers to whom I tell the events in our lives."

When Mrs. Freeman lost her cat, Captain, two listeners phoned to say they had found him. Other people have sent the Dale community a stream of gifts—from safety pins for Mrs. Dale's sister Sally (who never has one handy) to a bone for the dog, Bo'sun.

When Sally's second husband died in an air crash in South America, there were letters of sympathy—and proposals. To Mrs. Mountford, the crotchety neighbour of the Dales, two women sent a box of chocolates with a note: "We think you're an old bitch, but we love you."

Mrs. Dale often gets asked for advice—even to straighten out family problems. "I've been asked twice by marriage guidance counsellors to give talks with Douglas Burbidge—Mr. Dale to you—on how we stay so happily married," says Ellis Powell. "But what really frightened me to death was a letter I had from a hospital matron just after the Dale cat had had kittens. The hospital cat, she said, had been killed on the road, and could we possibly let her have one of our litter? If a matron can believe the diary is true, I thought, what are things coming to?"

### Four Million Listen To It

Undoubtedly, it is its "vicarious realism," as one of the radio critics called it, which has made *Mrs. Dale's Diary* so popular. The only programme which the B.B.C. thinks worthy of broadcasting twice a day, it has been continuously on the air for more than five years. Mrs. Dale has become a household name. More than four and a half million men, women and children listen to her. Her weekly fan mail averages two hundred letters—and at times of emotional stress in the diary it still rockets into four figures.

All this Mrs. Dale has achieved against every kind of critical drubbing—from a mildly derisive editorial in *The Times* to the "bourgeois" accusations of the *Daily Worker*. Now more than 1,300 episodes old, she looks like going on for ever. But then, as Ellis Powell says, she is no ordinary mortal.

For all but three months of Mrs. Dale's five years, Ellis Powell has been the diarist's voice. Her sympathetic characterization and her pleasant, kindly cadences are important factors in the diary's vast appeal.

Among Mrs. Dale's followers are Harley Street doctors, commercial travellers, dentists and businessmen. Five Oxford undergraduates and the staff of a laboratory at Cambridge have formed "Mrs. Dale tea clubs." Several mothers have written to say their babies are enraptured by the programme. "Many of the listeners," says Ellis Powell, "are people whose means of relaxation are limited—the old people, the lonely, and those in hospital. One woman in a Woolwich hospital refused to have her operation until she had heard the day's episode."

The story of how Ellis Powell came to portray the doctor's wife is part of the story of the creation of the programme. A descendant of American "soap opera," the diary grew out of *Front Line Family* and *The Robinsons*, the B.B.C.'s first family sagas, both of which were designed largely to show a British home in wartime. Popular appeal made the Robinsons outlive the

**Women who think up the diary: Joan Carr Jones and (behind) Jonquil Antony at a programme conference. On right: Lesley Wilson, who has now left the scriptwriting team to have a baby**

**Ellis Powell "drinking tea" during *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. A glass of water produces the sound effect**

After a broadcast, the Dale family and friends say goodbye outside the B.B.C. Left to right: Dr. Dale; Gwen Dale, now married and known as Gwen Owen; Norman Wright (executive producer); Mrs. Dale; Grandfather Dale; Sally Lane, Mrs. Dale's sister; Mrs. Morgan; Mrs. Freeman; Bob Dale

war by two years, but eventually Norman Collins, then head of the Light Programme, decided to replace them. With producer John MacMillan he invented the new family.

Its name, chosen because it was simple, easily remembered and typically British, came from scanning a telephone directory. The rest was imagination: Mrs. Dale's social standing and vital statistics (height 65 inches, hips 40, bust 38, stocking size 10, weight 144 pounds); her family, home and background ("Father: Occupation—teacher; Died—March 9, 1945, when German V2 fell on corner of Hunter's Grove and Paulham Road"); and the first of her many friends, neighbours and relatives.

Casting Mrs. Dale was not so straightforward. Dozens of tests were made before Ellis Powell, who had been playing a subsidiary cockney rôle in *The Robinsons*, was suggested. "I thought the part wasn't me at all," she says now, "but I read the test in my normal voice and I was in." A few weeks later, to the soothing sound of a harp, Mrs. Dale was born. These were her first realistic, sympathetic words: "I don't like Mondays—I don't like them at any time—and good gracious, what a Monday this has been!"

### Day Was Nearly Skipped

Like any other long-standing programme, *Mrs. Dale's Diary* has had its share of studio mishaps and dilemmas. Recently, the diary nearly skipped a day when the wrong record was taken to the studio. Ellis Powell also remembers the time when Poppy, a widow in the cast, broke off her engagement to Bob. Gently Mrs. Dale assured him that he would soon get over it and that he could never have made a satisfactory match with a widow. "I was saying all this in my stockinged feet because my shoes had been hurting me. Suddenly I felt something cold and wet slosh on to them. Derek Hard, who was playing Bob, waved his arms about rather a lot in front of the mike, and unwittingly he had spilt the glass of water he was holding. How I got through that emotional scene with cold feet I don't know."

Miss Powell is only half of Mrs. Dale. In turn, two other women share with her the job of bringing the diarist so convincingly to life. They are the scriptwriters, Jonquil Antony, a tall, dark-haired woman who started the diary with playwright Ted Willis; and Joan Carr Jones, an amiable ex-B.B.C. secretary who audaciously asked for a trial at scripting when an extra writer was needed.

They write in ten-day, 25,000-word stretches. Each week they are allowed to use eighteen characters in addition to the eight permanent players who comprise the "Mrs. Dale Repertory." To date, the diary has more than 350 subsidiary characters (Douglas Burbidge, alias Mr. Dale, has a dual rôle: as Bo'sun, the Dale's dog, he sniffs, barks, whines and pats his own chest). To keep a strict check on the traits and behaviour of this fictional community, the "Mrs. Dale Office" keeps an up-to-date file on each character. This has been proved necessary by such errors as the hat which changed colour three episodes after Mrs. Dale had bought it.

### Diary Is Taken From Life

To write the diary, the scriptwriters often call on their own experience. Jonquil Antony, who has seven dogs, two cats and a parrot, found a white pomeranian while holidaying in Italy with her husband. She brought the dog back to Britain, named it Bella, and put a similar incident in the diary. Joan Carr Jones went on a diet and subsequently thought she would "show Mrs. Dale what I went through." Much of the incident about Gwen's baby also came from Joan Carr Jones, who is herself a mother.

Realism has its snags. In their early days the Dales lived in a fictitious street in Kenton, a real London suburb. At 4.15 one afternoon Dr. Dale came home to tell his wife that he had had curry for lunch at the local hospital. Within an hour, members of the hospital staff were phoning the B.B.C. to say that the day's menu had not included curry. On another occasion, Mrs. Dale went shopping on Kenton's early closing day; and there were further howlers involving names of actual persons and streets. Eventually the Dales left Kenton. They moved to Parkwood Hill, a fictitious London suburb.

But the most shattering mistakes in the diary have occurred since the Dales began to grow up. In the file in the Mrs. Dale office two cards are filled with "age discrepancy notes." One of the first events in the diary which showed that Mrs. Dale was really beginning to age was her silver wedding on August 1, 1951. Shortly afterwards, one ardent listener, remembering that Bob Dale had been called up in September, 1944, worked out that he must be at least twenty-five—and that he must have been born out of wedlock.

It is curious that, although there is considerable realism in the diary, most of the criticism it has received—and it is probably the most criticized programme on the air—condemns it for lacking realism. A social affairs student analysed the diary thus: the family wavers between upper and lower middle class. Dr. and Mrs. Dale talk as though they have been accustomed to leisurely living but are hard up now. Yet their interests are not those of cultured people. They have few friends. They appear to have no interest in current affairs, no politics and no religion. They play little part in local community life.

### "She Never Has A Fling"

Other critics have also observed that Mrs. Dale never does any housework, never reads a book, never goes to the theatre, and the Dale men "exist only as objects of feminine criticism, anxiety, sentimentality and curiosity." Said *The Times*: "Mrs. Dale never seems to bet or to have a fling, to get a wrong number on the telephone or mention the government, to talk scandal, lose her temper or listen to the B.B.C. For all her equable demeanour and her air of normality, she is a mass of inhibitions."

People behind the diary have answers to the criticisms. Jonquil Antony says. "Books, theatres, politics are out because of the B.B.C. no advertising or propaganda rule. Also, we have to beware of the suceptibilities of a great many people. A couple of drinks will call down the wrath of the teetotallers and a lot of elderly ladies. And don't forget that the diary only gives fifteen minutes of Mrs. Dale's day."

Norman Wright, the executive producer of the diary, has the last word. "Mrs. Dale was never intended to do any cultural good-workery. She's just pure escapism." THE END

The natives were running and shouting at the sight of the planes. Worrand hardly noticed them, conscious only of the feel of Lyn in his arms

# VOLCANO

*by* ***FREDERICK HOWARD***

**Worrand could imagine it—the streams of red-hot steaming lava sweeping down on them. The last person he wanted here was his wife**

AT DAWN, on that third day after the disaster, District Commissioner John Worrand talked to the two reporters before they flew back from his rescue camp to the coast. It was not necessary for him to say much. From the tent doorway, the pressmen had only to look across the valley to measure the sort of damage that Mount Commando's eruption had spread across a hundred square miles of Western New Guinea.

The District Commissioner's square, Britannic jaw was freshly shaved, his dark, silver-tinged hair glossily brushed. His blue eyes were sunken with tiredness, but as calm as his incisive voice.

"I estimate fifteen hundred dead in the blast area. Burial parties have gone up as far as they safely can. That work stops at noon. We've asked the air force to lay on an air-lift. Two hundred casualties. Fix 'em up all right down at Aitangi. Evacuation to be complete by sunset, and this area closed till we get a volcanologist up to report. That's all that's of interest, eh?"

It wasn't, but neither of the pressmen knew the questions to ask. As the conference broke up, Worrand sat back, staring at Mount Commando. To his mind's eye, disconcerting questions began to form their query mark in the cloud above the volcano. Could one make a timetable against a mad mountain? Was it always enough to be skilled at giving orders?

He was aware now, for the first time in his life, that he had never permitted others to help him. That was why he was losing his wife. This was suddenly sharp and real, like the jagged crater against the sky. All his quarrels with Lyn had been stormily misted, inexplicable to him. Even that last night, a month ago, he

*ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT JOHNSTON*

*Continued on page 32*

# Dr. Bombard makes the impossible voyage

*by GUY ANGUS*

Bombard with the extractor used to squeeze drinkable water from the fish he caught

**People said he was crazy, but no one could stop him. In sixty-six days he crossed the Atlantic, and lived off the sea all the way**

PARIS

TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS, a weary figure staggered out of the Caribbean and on to a Barbados beach—and the world learned that shipwrecked seamen need never die of hunger or thirst. Alone, and on a tiny raft with only a rudimentary sail, with as little knowledge of navigation as the average shipwrecked sailor, Dr. Alain Bombard of Boulogne Hospital had surpassed even the Kon-tiki saga; he had drifted five thousand zigzag miles across two oceans and, except for a small snack in mid-Atlantic, he had "lived off the sea" all the way.

Last summer, everyone was telling the plump, twenty-seven year old experimenter that he was mad. His wife was awaiting her third child, and people thought the moment ill-chosen for a "voluntary shipwreck" suicide. Public figures said he should be locked up for his own good. Newspapers explained that the young man, who had once been dandled on Einstein's knee and who could remember seeing four Nobel prize-winners at his father's table, had grown up with the "complex of greatness"; in other words, he was a crank.

### Two Theories To Be Tested

Bombard, whose family have been doctors for four generations, had two theories. One was that a pneumatic raft he had designed gave better chances of survival than a lifeboat. The other was that a shipwrecked seaman can live off raw fish (vitamins A, B and D), and the plankton which feeds the greatest of mammals, the whale. Plankton, a tiny universal seaweed which Bombard says tastes like a mixture of spinach and caviare, contains vitamin C, which prevents scurvy. A shipwrecked man needs about five ounces daily.

For water, he could squeeze water from fish (the water is less than one per cent salt, and some fish contain more water than flesh), drink two pounds of sea-water daily, and gather rain. Two pounds of sea-water means just enough salt to replace that lost through perspiration, and enough water to parry thirst when fish and rain are not available. "Nobody is likely to drink too much sea," Bombard says. "It tastes too awful for that."

Although most people thought that Bombard was crazy, Jan Schat, a Dutch manufacturer of lifesaving equipment, offered to finance him. Bombard persuaded a roving British yachtsman, Jack Palmer to join him, and built a horseshoe-shaped float with four watertight divisions.

Bombard had discovered that, out of 200,000 deaths at sea every year, 50,000 take place in

Setting out to prove that the shipwrecked need not die: Bombard and Palmer in the Hérétique

lifeboats. He theorized that it takes twenty-seven days to die of hunger, seven to die of thirst and four to die—as most do—of moral despair. His experiment was meant to prove that hunger and thirst can always be reasonably satisfied, and thus cure the disease of despair.

The Hérétique, as the raft was called, was towed out of Monaco, on the Mediterranean, at dawn on May 25, 1952, and cast adrift. Bombard's wife, Ginette, waved him goodbye from the tow-ship. The weather was bad, the one and only attempt to use the radio transmitter failed when its kite aerial crashed into the sea, and a fierce wind threatened to sweep the craft on to the rocks of the Riviera.

With the floating anchor out, Palmer and Bombard tried to steer for Minorca, in the Balearic Islands. Under the waterproof cloth, (which could cover the whole raft if necessary) they packed away their radio, sextant, navigation manuals, sleeping bags, field glasses, photographic equipment, a book on fishing, rubber seats (to prevent boils), medical kit, flares and lifebelts. The battle with the ocean was on.

For the first two days the two men fished constantly, but caught nothing. But on the third day they landed a nine-pound hake, which supplied food and drink for twenty-four hours. Three ships—two Spanish and one Italian—hove to on the fifth day in vain attempts to "rescue" them. During the night, a French steamer pounded close by, and they swung a torch and a hurricane lamp to avoid collision.

### A Rare Monster Appeared

As the easterly point of Minorca, Monte Toro, hove into sight, there came the first heavy storm. The sail was taken down, the floating anchor dropped to keep the craft head-on to the waves which broke over the Hérétique. But the craft proved unsubmergeable; the two men kept dry, and slept in turns.

The next afternoon, Bombard emerged from the raft-cover at the sound of a strange bleating noise. To his amazement, a white whale floated a hundred yards from the raft. While Bombard photographed the rare monster, Palmer anxiously watched the capricious flicks of the immense tail, which could have capsized the raft. The whale disappeared into the fog, and the storm—which was to last for six days—redoubled its frenzy.

On June 2, Bombard awoke with a violent pain in the jaw—an abscess caused by a scratch which, for the lack of vitamins, had not healed. Bombard sterilized his pocket knife in the flame of the hurricane lamp and lanced the abscess, powdering the spot with sulphonamide. The pain grew intense and then, as the sulphonamide took effect, passed away. By this time, both men were covered in angry pimples, dried skin and unhealed cuts. They had had nothing but sea-water for six days.

On June 10 the storm died down, but after a few hours of sunshine the barometer began falling again. Another storm was approaching, and neither man had the strength to face it.

The next morning, at four o'clock, a steamer approached on its way to Marseilles. "The captain clearly thought we were mad," says Bombard. "He wasn't very keen on giving us food, but finally parted with three tins of corned beef, a tin of condensed milk, some sea biscuits and two tins of drinking water. He refused Jack a packet of cigarettes. But now that we had food we did not mind how much it stormed."

### Coast Was Inaccessible

On the twelfth, thirteen days after they had first seen Minorca, the island appeared in sight again. Nearer shore, the sea grew rough, and that night carried away one of the oars, needed for landing. At dawn, land was fifty yards to port, but the coast of Minorca is so rocky and inaccessible that it was not till the seventeenth that they reached the port of Ciudadela.

After a brief respite, the two men set sail for Tangiers. When they staggered ashore there, they were covered in pimples and unhealed cuts. Palmer had had enough. "We can't cross the Atlantic in the typhoon season. It would be suicide," he told the Frenchman.

Their patron, Jan Schat, flew to Tangiers and joined Palmer in trying to dissuade Bombard from continuing. "You've proved your point. Come home now and be with your wife when she has her baby." Bombard shook his head and, on August 13, the young doctor headed the Hérétique for the ocean, alone.

Six days later he reached Casablanca, and again people tried to dissuade him from continuing. He went on. A week later a Portuguese ship stopped to offer him food and water. "No, thanks," replied Bombard. "A shipwrecked sailor wouldn't get the chance. Anyway, a quarter of an hour each morning with the fishing line brings me enough to eat and drink. There are plenty of fish: I chew the small ones and squeeze the big ones. And the Atlantic is much less salty than the Mediterranean."

On September 3, after fighting a contrary wind for more than nine hours, he landed at Las Palmas, the capital of the Canary Islands. There, at the French Consulate, a message awaited him: "You have another daughter."

Journey's end: the Hérétique at Barbados.

Again he was urged to give up the idea of crossing to America. As a final argument, an old fisherman told him, "There are no fish near the surface in the middle of the Atlantic." That decided him. If his experiment was to be authentic, he had to try it where there were said to be no surface fish. He flew back to France to see his wife and newborn child, Nathalie. "Carry on, Alain," his wife told him.

He flew back to Las Palmas, gave his raft a last inspection, and set off on October 19. For sixty-six days he was to live on fish, plankton, sea and rain.

The departure from Las Palmas was quite an event. The yacht club asked Bombard to leave on a Sunday, so that everyone could escort him out of the archipelago. The French Consul wept with emotion and kissed him on both cheeks; the steamers in port sounded sirens. A Spanish cadet four-masted sailing vessel hove to and lowered its flag; the cadets lined the decks and doffed their caps. "I had the impression that I was already dead," Bombard says with a grin.

### Followed Columbus's Route

Bombard headed south to avoid the seaweed of the Sargasso Sea. He was following the route of Columbus's second voyage. From three days after Las Palmas until the end of the voyage, he was followed night and day by visible hordes of fish crowding his shadow. A few minutes' fishing every day was enough.

In an attempt to catch them by stabbing with a knife—he caught one dorado that way—Bombard injured two fish, one by the gills and another by the tail: these two fish, each with easily recognizable scars, followed him to the West Indies and were visible in the raft's shadow every day. He lost all his hooks on large fish, and replaced them with segments of dorado's backbones. As with the Kon-tiki expedition, the raft was littered every morning with dead or dying flying fish which had hit the sail during the night.

A tempest developed on the third day out from Las Palmas, carrying the Hérétique like a surfboard on the crest of the waves. Two

With his wife and mother-in-law, Bombard plays with his daughter. The child was born while he was on the voyage which critics called a "voluntary shipwreck" suicide

Bombard had had to bail for thirteen days

Smile of victory. The bearded Bombard is entertained after reaching the West Indies

nights later, the raft slipped on the front of a wave and was submerged. Bombard awoke neck deep in water, and started bailing. The job took ten hours.

The next day the wind continued to blow hard, and the sail split. Bombard had a spare sail but, rigged too tightly, it was swept away in fifteen minutes. It took him twelve hours to repair the old one.

On October 27, Bombard celebrated his twenty-eighth birthday with a poultry lunch. A shearwater—a bird resembling the stormy petrel—dived towards the water and came away with Bombard's bait. Bombard hauled it in, struggling furiously. He killed and plucked the bird and ate it raw, "but it tasted exactly the same as fish."

### Shark Was Beaten Off

That night, as a final birthday amusement, Bombard flashed his torch on the phosphorescent waves to attract fish. Hundreds of fish of all kinds swarmed to the raft. Finally a shark swam up. After making two or three passes with its tail, hitting the inflated raft with a "noise like a kicked football," it made a frontal charge but disappeared after Bombard had beaten its snout with one of the oars.

Through the constant damp and his monotonous diet, Bombard began to suffer from erupting spots. On November 2, his pneumatic cushion slipped overboard. Bombard lowered the sail, dropped the floating anchor and dived off.

In 1951, Bombard had successfully swum the Channel in the *Daily Mail* race, spending twenty-one hours in the water. But now, after a few minutes' swimming, he felt weak. He grabbed the cushion and turned back.

To his horror, the floating anchor had swirled out parachute-fashion and the Hérétique was scudding away. He abandoned the cushion and swam as fast as he could. After more than an hour of vain pursuit, he was giving up hope when the knot of the anchor came untied and the cup-shaped cloth spread out flat; the raft stopped. He clambered aboard, exhausted.

The great problem, Bombard says, was to keep occupied. Boredom and fatigue come with lack of activity. He had regular hours for fishing, eating, inspecting his craft, catching plankton and reading the sextant. During the afternoons, the principal enemy was the sun. Bombard, who is an accomplished musician, composed two quartets. When the sun passed behind the sail, he took advantage of the relative coolness to write his log.

The radio receiver worked, and this was important in reading positions, for it gave him the correct time. But later, after Bombard had indulged himself with a series of B.B.C. symphony concerts, the battery gave out.

Every day he saw birds. Sharks gave little trouble, but a swordfish, swirling round the raft in a gleam of phosphorescent water, made Bombard spend a sleepless night. Poised against a charge that would have punctured his float, Bombard lost his harpoon and had to make another with a pocket knife. At dawn, the swordfish dived and disappeared.

Bombard also caught a venomous snake-mackerel, first discovered by the Kon-tiki expedition. It bit the sleeping bag, and Bombard, who was covered in sores, decided not to use it again for the rest of the voyage.

### He Had To "Read The Birds"

The cyclones started, giving Bombard his first bath—and his first fresh water for three weeks. Rain persisted for several days. His watch became clogged with salt. Unable any longer to read longitude, he was left with the highly inaccurate alternative of "reading the birds."

A tropical whitetail, which the manuals give as "only seen west of the Sargasso," he first spotted 1,500 miles out at sea. On November 22, he saw three whitetails together ("not more than eighty miles from shore"), a frigate bird ("one hundred miles—exceptionally three hundred"), and a northern gannet ("never more than ninety miles"). He was then 1,200 nautical miles from Guadeloupe.

On November 13, the cyclone became more furious: the rudder broke and the raft-cover—his only protection against the rain—split in two. Bombard repaired them and, after two or three sleepless nights, settled down under the "tent" to sleep the clock round. It was the night of November 16: the sound of tearing canvas awoke him at 3 a.m. A large fish had jumped from the sea and snapped away the precious cover. For the rest of the journey he was unprotected from the rain.

Because of the storm, he had not fished for three days. He was losing strength. Although he had penicillin aboard, it was for use in the last resort, and he treated himself only with mercurochrome, a drug found in the first-aid box of every lifeboat. Finally, the storm died away. The Hérétique was a floating wreck, covered underneath with shellfish and with rubber sheeting trailing behind. The stitches and glue had given way in many places.

### Calm Was The Hardest Test

In the hot sun which followed the storm, the sores which covered him healed in a few days, proving that there was no serious lack of vitamins in his marine diet. To pass the time, he did gymnastics and threw medicine bottles containing messages for his wife into the sea.

Then came the hardest test of the crossing—twenty-seven days of morale-destroying, monotonous, arresting calm. At first, Bombard thought it meant land, for according to the manuals the trade winds do not fail in winter in mid-ocean. But instead of his estimation of two hundred nautical miles, 1,300 remained to be covered. He began to attach importance to every sign—an electric light bulb floating in the water, birds which "never pass the night at sea," and plankton bearing fish eggs—all suggestive that land was near.

To estimate his speed he threw chemicals into the water; but the red patch they made was visible astern for three days. His will began to crack, and even the approach of the most dangerous fish in the world, a giant sting-ray, black and silvery and big enough to smother the raft—the sting-ray's usual method of attack—hardly shook him from his torpor.

Another danger, that the tiny shellfish in the seams would split the raft from underneath, was cleared in a few minutes when a series of popping noises one day announced that balistes were sucking all the crustaceans off. Bombard caught one and took its photograph—"he had ravishing blue eyes"—in gratitude.

Digestive troubles began. He grew very thin, and every action cost enormous effort. He began

*Continued on page 35*

# AFTER

ECCENTRIC, bohemian Cora Lansquenet had always loved to shock people. She had shocked the whole family, after her brother Richard Abernethie's funeral, by chirruping: "But he *was* murdered, wasn't he?" And less than twenty-four hours later she had given them the biggest shock of all. She herself had been murdered at her country cottage—with a hatchet.

Hercule Poirot heard the details of the case from Mr. Entwhistle, Richard's solicitor and a mutual friend. Shrewd, methodical Mr. Entwhistle had been doing some preliminary investigation on his own. The great Belgian detective listened keenly.

According to Miss Gilchrist, Cora's companion-help, Richard had told Cora, just before his death, that someone was trying to poison him. Unfortunately, Richard had been cremated, so there was no question of a post-mortem. It was known, too, that Richard distrusted his family, especially the younger generation.

That, Mr. Entwhistle confessed ruefully, was really all the evidence. Except—it sounded vague and silly—that Helen Abernethie, Richard's sister-in-law, had felt, as she looked round the family when Cora made that devastating remark, that something looked *wrong*, out of place. . . . And Helen, Mr. Entwhistle emphasized, was a sensible woman, not given to hallucinations. He hoped she would remember what it was.

All the Abernethies were amply provided for by Richard's will. Could one of them have murdered him?

Poirot wasted no time on theories. He was ruthlessly practical. He immediately seized on one urgent point: if there was any connection between the deaths of Richard and Cora, then Miss Gilchrist was in danger. In danger because Cora might have told her something. She was still living in Cora's cottage; she should not be left alone.

Fortunately, Susan Banks, Cora's niece, who had inherited most of Cora's things, went down to the cottage to go through them. Miss Gilchrist made her welcome with tea and scones, and offered her some wedding-cake which someone had sent her. Susan refused, but Miss Gilchrist enjoyed it thoroughly.

That night, Susan slept in the room where Cora had been murdered. She lay awake for a long time, fighting down her nerves, feeling as if some unseen person were in the room with her.

Then she heard someone moaning in terrible pain. The sound came from Miss Gilchrist's room. Flinging on a dressing-gown, Susan went and tapped on her door.

## PART 4

### *Ambulance For Miss Gilchrist*

MISS GILCHRIST'S light was on. She was sitting up in bed. She looked ghastly; her face was distorted with pain. Susan cried: "Miss Gilchrist, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"Yes. I don't know what—I. . . ." She tried to get out of bed, was seized with a fit of vomiting and then collapsed back on the pillows.

She murmured: "Please—ring up doctor. Must have eaten something. . . ."

"I'll get you some bicarbonate. We can get

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**"What have you got there?" said the voice, George's voice. Susan started violently. She had thought herself alone in the cottage**

# THE FUNERAL

*by AGATHA CHRISTIE*

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM LITTLE

**One by one, the alibis were blown sky-high—and Poirot knew it was time for action. He planned one of the most audacious strokes of his career**

the doctor in the morning if you're not better."

Miss Gilchrist shook her head. "No, get doctor now. I—I feel dreadful."

"Do you know his number? Or shall I look in the book?"

Miss Gilchrist gave her the number. She was interrupted by another fit of retching.

Susan's call was answered by a sleepy male voice. "Who? Gilchrist? In Mead's Lane. Yes, I know. I'll be right along."

He was as good as his word. Ten minutes later Susan heard his car draw up outside and she went to open the door for him. She explained the case as she took him upstairs. "I think," she said, "she must have eaten something that disagreed with her. But she seems pretty bad."

The doctor had had the air of one keeping his temper in leash and who has had some experience of being called out unnecessarily on more than one occasion. But as soon as he examined the moaning woman his manner changed. He gave various curt orders to Susan and presently came down and telephoned. Then he joined Susan in the sitting-room.

"I've sent for an ambulance. Must get her into hospital."

"She's really bad, then?"

"Yes. I've given her a shot of morphia to ease the pain. But it looks——" he broke off. "What's she eaten?"

"We had macaroni *au gratin* for supper and a custard pudding. Coffee afterwards."

"You had the same things?"

"Yes."

"And you're all right? No discomfort?"

"No."

"She's taken nothing else? No tinned fish? Or sausages?"

"No. We had lunch at the King's Arms—after the inquest."

"Yes, of course. You're Mrs. Lansquenet's niece. Dreadful business. Hope they catch the man who did it."

"Yes, indeed."

The ambulance came. Miss Gilchrist was taken away and the doctor went with her. He told Susan he would ring her up in the morning. When he had left, she went upstairs to bed.

This time she fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

* * *

The funeral was well attended. Most of the village had turned out. Susan and Mr. Entwhistle were the only mourners, but various wreaths had been sent by the other members of the family. Mr. Entwhistle asked where Miss Gilchrist was, and Susan explained the circumstances in a hurried whisper. Mr. Entwhistle raised his eyebrows.

"Rather an odd occurrence?"

"Oh, she's better this morning. They rang up from the hospital. People do get these bilious turns."

Mr. Entwhistle said no more. He was returning to London immediately after the funeral.

Susan went back to the cottage. She found some eggs and made herself an omelet. Then she went up to Cora's room and started to sort through the dead woman's things. She was interrupted by the arrival of the doctor.

The doctor was looking worried. He replied to Susan's inquiry by saying that Miss Gilchrist was much better.

"She'll be out and around in a couple of days," he said. "But it was lucky I got called so promptly. Otherwise—it might have been a near thing."

Susan stared. "Was she really so bad?"

"Mrs. Banks, will you tell me again exactly what Miss Gilchrist had to eat and drink yesterday. Everything."

Susan reflected and gave a meticulous account.

The doctor shook his head in a dissatisfied manner. "There must have been something she had and you didn't?"

"I don't think so. . . . Cakes, scones, jam, tea—and then supper. No, I can't remember anything. Was it definitely something she ate? Definitely food poisoning?"

The doctor threw her a sharp glance. Then he seemed to come to a decision. "It was arsenic," he said.

"Arsenic?" Susan stared. "You mean somebody gave her arsenic?"

"That's what it looks like."

"Could she have taken it herself? Deliberately, I mean?"

"Suicide? She says not and she should know. Besides, if she wanted to commit suicide she wouldn't be likely to choose arsenic. There are sleeping pills in this house. She could have taken an overdose of them."

"Could the arsenic have got into something by accident?"

"That's what I'm wondering. It seems very unlikely, but such things have been known. But if you and she ate the same things——"

Susan nodded. She said: "It all seems impossible——" Then she gave a sudden gasp. "Why, of course, the wedding cake!"

"What's that? Wedding cake?"

Susan explained. The doctor listened with close attention.

"Odd. And you say she wasn't sure who sent it? Any of it left? Or is the box it came in lying around?"

"I don't know. I'll look."

They searched together and finally found the white cardboard box with a few crumbs of cake still in it lying on the kitchen dresser. The doctor packed it away with some care.

"I'll take charge of this. Any idea where the wrapping paper it came in might be?"

Here they were not successful and Susan said that it had probably gone into the kitchen stove.

"You won't be leaving here just yet, Mrs. Banks?" His tone was genial, but it made Susan feel a little uncomfortable.

"No, I have to go through my aunt's things. I shall be here for a few days."

"Good. You understand the police will probably want to ask some questions. You don't know of anyone who—well, might have had it in for Miss Gilchrist?"

Susan shook her head. "I don't really know much about her. She was with my aunt for some years—that's all I know."

"Quite, quite. Always seemed a pleasant, unassuming woman—quite ordinary. Not the

*Continued on page 27*

## PEOPLE IN THE CASE

*TIMOTHY ABERNETHIE*—younger brother of the dead Richard Abernethie. A blustering old hypochondriac, affronted at not inheriting *all* his brother's money. Childishly dependent on *MAUDIE*, his fussily devoted wife—a big, capable, tweedy woman.

*HELEN ABERNETHIE*—Richard's favourite; his brother Leo's widow. Fiftyish, charming and intelligent.

*ROSAMUND SHANE*—Richard's lovely, scatterbrained niece. With her vain, ambitious husband, *MICHAEL*, earns a precarious living from the stage.

*SUSAN BANKS* — Richard's other niece, who inherited his good business sense and strong personality. Married—in spite of family disapproval — to *GREGORY*, a neurotic, ineffectual, chemist's assistant.

*GEORGE CROSSFIELD* — Richard's racy young nephew, who works for a shady firm of solicitors, and—Mr. Entwhistle suspects—has been speculating with his clients' money.

*CORA LANSQUENET*—Richard's youngest sister, found brutally murdered with a hatchet at her country cottage the day after the funeral, by *MISS GILCHRIST*, her genteel, twittery companion-help.

# WE BLAZE THE TRAIL FOR MONTY

**Later, it became known as "No. 3 Commando Bridge." It lay ten miles behind the lines across the main enemy supply road. We were to seize it—and hold on until Monty's army relieved us**

**Brigadier John Durnford Slater was the first man ashore on the Sicily invasion. Monty called the raid he led a "classic operation"**

**Peter Young. A veteran Commando and second in command to Slater, he won a D.S.O. and three M.C.s. He ended the war as brigadier**

**Sergeant Lofty King, M.M. A London ex-fireman, he was a tough, aggressive fighter. He was offered a commission but turned it down**

AS NO. 3 COMMANDO approached Sicily, in the late afternoon, we could see the top of Mount Etna. The sea had become very rough, and it seemed impossible to achieve a surprise attack, but my men were singing and laughing as if this were just another exercise run-in, instead of the prelude to a full-scale invasion.

Ten miles out we transferred to small landing craft. Darkness had now come to cover us. We headed towards the coast, making for the Scoglio, a prominent rocky feature near our landing place. Very soon we saw it—a natural pillar of rock, two hundred feet high and fifty yards in diameter, standing almost perpendicular from the surrounding country.

Suddenly, when we were a couple of hundred yards from the beach, we were spotted, and a stream of machine-gun fire came at us from a pillbox. We replied with about a dozen Vickers K guns mounted in the bows of each landing craft. Very soon the fire from the pillbox stopped. It was manned by Italians, who, at this stage of the war, seemed easily demoralized.

I had briefed Lieutenant Holt, the flotilla commander, to put me on the beach first, but at the last moment I saw a boat coming in with a late spurt on the outside. It belonged to Charlie Head, my adjutant, who wanted to beat me for the honour of being first man into Sicily. He didn't quite make it.

The other boats landed their men. We were faced by masses of wire and many pillboxes—all useless unless manned by determined troops. We were soon through. We formed up a hundred yards inland, exactly as we had practised. I crouched down to my batman, Charlesworth, to tell him something. Our faces were inches apart when a tracer bullet flashed between our noses. Charlesworth and I reared up like startled horses. Neither of us spoke.

## Advanced In The Moonlight

Then the firing stopped. The country was flat and open, with a high stone wall dividing the fields every few hundred yards. We started our advance preceded by two scouts. It was a bright moonlight night and now everything was still. We were the only ones ashore. "Get those scouts moving faster," I said impatiently to Lieutenant Pooley. This was no reflection on the scouts' courage: after a landing in a strange country, they were apt to go a bit slow.

Soon, still not content with our speed, I went to Pooley again. "Look, John; let's get out in front together. Unless we're quick that battery will be firing on the main landing." I was uneasy. The battery we had to capture was three miles inland behind the village of Cassibile, and it was sited to fire along the main landing area at Syracuse. I had promised General Dempsey to silence it in ninety minutes from the time of our beaching.

I continually flashed a shaded torch back to the advancing column. This worked very well, and soon we were moving in double file at a good speed. I could hear the occasional noise of a dislodged stone and the shuffle of feet; that was all. My men were heavily laden, each of them carrying a ten-pound mortar bomb in addition to his equipment. There was little talk; just necessary orders, and few were needed.

"This is nice and quiet," I whispered to Pooley. "We might be on a training scheme." He nodded. We came to a farmhouse. After I passed it, the farmer rushed out with a shotgun. He fired it at one of my men. Later, Curly Gimbert remarked: "Sorry we had to shoot that farmer. He was a good chap. He had the right spirit."

## The Attack Goes In

Just after this, I heard the battery firing. This made me doubly anxious to get to work. We reached a dry river bed which ran in front of the battery, and I detached a party of ten men to crawl up and harass it from the front with two-inch mortar and rifle fire. Meanwhile, the three-inch mortar was sited exactly along the line of guns, four hundred yards from them. Each man dropped his mortar bomb as he passed the spot. Four Bren guns were also placed here. In a few minutes we had the battery under devastating fire, both from the front and the left flank.

All this time the rest of our party was forming up in the rear of the battery. "The assault is going ahead in five minutes' time," I said over the wireless to Lieutenant Westley on the left flank, and to Sergeant Fraser, who was in charge of the party in the river bed. From time to time Fraser's men shot parachute flares over the battery. Our assaulting troops then poured in heavy additional fire. When the flare's light died down we resumed our advance. We came to barbed wire and blasted paths through it with Bangalore torpedoes—long metal tubes filled with explosive.

We dashed through the gaps firing from the hip. I was using my Garand. I was fond of that weapon. Finally we used the bayonet. The Italians stuck it fairly well until near the end, replying to our fire with automatic weapons. We cleaned them up. Then we proceeded to blow up the guns. Some enthusiast, just in the spirit of clean fun, also decided to blow up the ammunition supply of the battery—about one thousand shells. It was a very loud bang indeed. There was plenty of stuff flying and it was a

ILLUSTRATION BY FRED LAURENT

**All day we hid in the ditch. From time to time enemy troops passed us on patrol. We waited silently, ready to give them a warm reception**

very foolish act, but fortunately no one was hurt.

The battery was blown up eighty-five minutes after landing—redeeming my word to General Dempsey with five minutes to spare. Of all the operations in which I took part, I enjoyed this the most. It was carried to a successful conclusion without a casualty.

We then moved to Cassibile as arranged. While we were waiting, Charlesworth and Lofty King, both ex-army bandsmen, dug up some musical instruments—a trumpet and a bass drum—and began to entertain us. A Scottish regiment entered the town from the beach with the piper playing. The Jocks thought they were first into the village. It must have come as a shock to them to hear "The Same To You" from the trumpet and the drum.

On July 13 I received a signal to go at once to Syracuse to meet Monty, General Dempsey and Admiral McGregor, to plan another operation. The battle was going favourably and the three senior officers were in high spirits. Dempsey, who did most of the talking, began: "We've got a new operation for you tonight. It's an ambitious one, but I think you'll like it." Then he unfolded the details of the job.

No. 3 Commando was to land ten miles behind the lines and advance seven miles inland to seize the Punta di Melati, a bridge over the Leonardo River two miles north of Lentini. Monty's intelligence men, usually unerringly exact, said that only Italian opposition was likely to be met on the beaches. They knew of no German troops in the vicinity. I have an instinct for danger and was not so sure. That bridge was on the only road linking the German and Italian armies with their bases at Messina. It seemed likely to me that the Germans would want to make sure it was well guarded.

### Monty Wished Him Luck

Before I left, Monty had a last word: "The enemy is nicely on the move," he said, full of energy. "We want to keep him that way. You can help us to do it. Good luck, Slater."

The landing had to take place at ten o'clock that night. This did not leave us much time. We boarded the Prince Albert at once and sailed up the coast. This left us only a couple of hours for issuing orders and briefing the men on this highly complex operation.

Again our transfer to Holt's flotilla of landing craft was carried out smoothly. Before we hit the beach a concentrated crossfire was opened on us from several pillboxes. We returned the fire heavily and the whole place was quickly lit up with tracer bullets, which passed angrily in the air from both directions. A sailor was shooting from just behind me, so that the muzzle of his weapon was only a few inches from my head. Holt shouted, "Don't shoot the colonel's bloody head off!" I found it all most exhilarating.

This time, however, Holt overdid my instructions to beach my boat first. He put me on shore at least two lengths clear of all the others. In addition, the man who followed me out of the craft was carrying an eight-foot Bangalore torpedo. He got this jammed across the three-foot ramp leading from the boat, and the press of men behind him caused a serious hold-up.

I was left nakedly alone on the beach for what seemed a very long time. The sand boiled up around me as the bullets struck. Somebody also started throwing grenades down the cliff at me. I thought the bullets were enough without these extras. But at last the other boats were beached, and with a cheer the men went to work on the wire.

Very soon after we passed through the wire, some men from No. 3 Troop brought back a

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prisoner for me to view. "Lieutenant Herbert has sent back this prisoner for you, sir," a lance-corporal told me, very correctly. I looked at the prisoner. He was in German uniform. This was George's effective way of telling me there were Germans about.

Over the next mile, through the village of Agnone, we had a series of violent little battles. We had to advance continually against machine-gun posts. In one foray, George Herbert was knocked unconscious by an exploding grenade. He was bleeding from one ear. When he recovered consciousness, I asked anxiously, "How are you, George?"

He groaned. "Getting weaker," he said. George thought he was done for, but fortunately he had just had a temporary concussion. In ten minutes he was on his feet and leading the advance in his usual fighting, forceful style.

Peter Young, my second-in-command, Charlie Head and Troop Sergeant Lofty King were also operating in magnificently aggressive form. We passed Agnone station and, just as we did, Captain Tim Leese, the commander of one troop, was shot through the eye. Then, suddenly it seemed, we ran out of all the trouble.

I called a short halt for a troop commanders' meeting to count the casualties. We had left thirty men behind on the beach, giving us a strength of 160 officers and men. John Pooley was in the second flight an hour and a half behind.

I said: "We'll continue the advance with Four Troop leading, then Three, then One—with Headquarters in front with Four. . . . For God's sake, don't straggle: we're going to cover about three miles of rough country before we strike the bridge. We must push on fast to get to it before the enemy's main retreat."

### Jumped Into Water

We struck across country and found ourselves in rocky, low hills. We forced our way through bramble thickets and over stone walls, and then we came to the Leonardo, about a mile below the bridge. "It looks shallow to me," Bill Lloyd said. "I'll try it for depth." He jumped in—and disappeared under the water. He scrambled out again.

Several other places were tried and at last we found a ford, waist deep. I thought it important to cross the river first and come in on the men defending the bridge from the unexpected north. Now we passed through olive groves, moving quietly and easily.

Then, 250 yards ahead, I saw the bridge, white in the moonlight. I could make out four pillboxes at our end of the bridge, but there was no enemy soldier in sight. A lorry crossed, its lights dim, its driver confident that there were still ten miles between him and the nearest Allied troops.

We paused there for five minutes so that the unit could form up. It was nearly midnight. I said: "All right—Four Troop go ahead." It was up to Bill Lloyd and his men to clear the pillboxes. I went with him.

### Shattered The Silence

The night was as still as it would have been in the heart of Cornwall. Then Lieutenant Brian Butler, commanding the leading section, rushed each pillbox with his men, throwing grenades, cracking the silence wide open. There were liquid shouts and loud groans.

I turned to Lloyd. "Well, they're Eyeties anyhow—that's a good thing."

The pillboxes at our end of the bridge were all cleared in ten minutes. The position was quickly consolidated and we made our dispositions for the events to come. The ground was like concrete. Despite our efforts, it was not possible in the time available to dig proper defensive positions. The best we could do was make use of the cover of concrete works constructed by the Italians—mostly the pillboxes.

All was still again. I was feeling tired after our long march and decided to have a little snooze, using my haversack as a pillow. Soon I was woken up by a loud explosion very close.

"What's that?" I asked Charlie.

He said calmly, "A mortar bomb."

"Don't be silly," I said, "we haven't brought a mortar."

"No—but *they* have," Charlie replied.

They had, indeed. For the next few hours they showered us with mortar bombs, inflicting many casualties. By the time John Pooley arrived with the second flight, the casualties were mounting—we had about fifteen killed and wounded. The trouble was that we didn't have enough cover. The pillboxes could take only about a dozen, and now our strength was 350 officers and men.

### Attacked By Tiger Tank

There was a clump of evergreen trees beyond the far end of the bridge. Out of it, unexpectedly, a Tiger tank appeared. It started shooting at us with its eighty-eight and its machine-gun. I knew then that we were facing Germans as well as Italians. Later I learned that a parachute company had been quartered in the evergreen wood the day before.

As I was conferring with Charlie Head in an adjacent olive grove, a branch—sliced clean off by an eighty-eight shell—fell on me. A minute later I felt the wind of another shell parting my hair (I had some in those days). There was a great deal of shooting in both directions.

All this time there had been a flow of German traffic southbound from Messina. As the lorries came we shot them up. I had stationed a troop a hundred yards up the road to deal with such matters, and now the noise was heightened by the bursting ammunition from these burning lorries.

I was upset at the extent of our casualties and decided to take revenge by joining in the game of dispatching a few of the *Herrenvolk* travelling in the lorries. I went towards one which had just been set alight by our gunfire and a huge German came out, roaring with indignation. He caught me off-balance. Fortunately, George Herbert was at hand and dispatched him with a single shot from the hip.

"You get the hell out of here, Colonel," George said crossly. "There's plenty for you to do running the unit."

At that point another German ammunition lorry arrived. Cave, a young officer who had recently joined us, bravely but unwisely fired his Piat into it at point-blank range. An enormous explosion followed, with Cave in it. He died shortly after.

### Died Fighting Mad

A mortar bomb which burst at his feet wounded Bill Lloyd badly just after this, fracturing both his ankles so that the bones of one protruded from the flesh. Lofty King found a bicycle and propped Bill up on it. "If you've never seen a man ride a bike with two broken legs," Bill said bravely, "look at me."

He rode off, assisted by two men, to continue the battle. Some time later, still on the cycle and still helped by the two soldiers, he led an attack on a German machine-gun post and was killed. This was my most serious personal loss of the war. Bill died fighting mad. He was a quiet man normally; courageous but unspectacular. He died in a spectacular way.

Sergeant Hopkins, a regular soldier and a King's marksman, had two fingers shot off his right hand at about the time Bill was first wounded. He walked back to Lofty King, waving his hand, which was streaming with blood. "That's the lot, Lofty," he said. "I'm finished with shooting now." He didn't realize that he had received two severe chest wounds. He died of them later that night.

I had sent John Pooley forward to do something about that troublesome tank. He went off with a party of men in extended line. I was horrified to see the entire line fall together—then breathed again when they picked themselves up. They had merely fallen over a trip wire which, fortunately, had not been mined.

A moment later they were in a house

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# FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

LARGE areas of New Guinea's mountainous interior are still a blank on the map. There, cut off from the rest of the world by almost impenetrable jungle, live the Papuans—and their dwarf-like enemies, the pygmies.

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*Alfred Vogel with a New Guinea pygmy man and wife. The author's height is five foot six inches*

*A courting Papuan couple. Kissing on the mouth is unknown to them. They rub noses together*

and, using it for cover, fired heavily on the tank with their Brens and a Piat. Unfortunately, the Piat, which could have knocked the tank out, was just beyond its effective range.

The bridge was about 120 yards long and eventually Three Troop, moving under it, were halfway to the other side. Then the German paratroops, lining the far bank, began to shoot down on them. Taking whatever cover the bridge could give them, they held out for about an hour on the other side of the river. Then I ordered them to withdraw. Of sixty men, eight were casualties.

### Fleet Bombardment

The plan was that 50th Division was to fight their way to relieve us by first light—about 4.30 a.m.—but they did not arrive, and it was not until later that I learned that the division had been held up in a major battle near Lentini.

By now, too, another battle was under way six miles to our north at the Primasole Bridge, between our airborne forces and the Germans. From time to time the fleet took a hand, bombarding Lentini. It was a noisy morning.

At first light I saw that there was little hope of holding on. I decided to move to hilly country to our west, from which I hoped still to dominate the bridge—at least for a while.

We started to move, troop by troop. Now our training and discipline proved their values. One section climbed the first hill in extended order, accurately pursued by airbursts from the tank's eighty-eight. A shell burst over the middle of the section. A man dropped. The rest were unhurt. This revealed that our dispersed formations, which we had pounded into the men during training, actually did minimize casualties.

Another shell-burst, directly behind him, seriously wounded Charlie Head. When he fell, Lofty King picked him up and started to carry him along with the rest of us. "Drop me and go on," Charlie said to him. "I wouldn't do this for you."

Lofty stopped dead in his tracks. "No," he muttered, "I don't believe you would," and continued to carry him. They were two big men; they made quite a lump together.

We reached the railway line again. The fragments from the airburst shells made nasty sounds ricocheting from the lines. Shortly we were established, however, in a good position on the hill. The tank had crossed the bridge after us and got busy sweeping the hill with its machine-gun.

### Hid The Wounded

I called for another troop commanders' meeting. "It's obvious," I said, "that 50 Div. can't reach us. There's nothing more for us here: we must get back. Our only chance is to split into small parties. Lie up where you can during the day and make your way back to our lines tonight."

Then I walked over to talk to Charlie Head. He and my batman, Charlesworth, were too badly wounded to move off with us. We hid them carefully in a house. "Best of luck, Charlie," I said, hating like hell to leave him, "50 Div. is sure to be here this afternoon." Charlesworth was not hit quite so badly as Charlie, although neither could walk. I told him to look after Head.

Charlie grinned. "We'll be all right," he assured me. He looked very ill, just the same.

I moved off with my party, which included George Herbert, Brian Butler and Peter Young. We had not gone far when we saw some thick olive groves—a good place to hide in during the day. To reach the groves we had to cross a large field of ploughed land. Before getting to the field we came to a small tomato garden. They were the best tomatoes I have ever eaten.

We moved on and as we stepped into the ploughed land of the big field, George Herbert spotted some men beyond the far edge. He peered at them through his glasses. "They're Germans," he said.

### Friends Were Enemies

I looked at them through my own glasses. "They're not," I said. "They're some of our own men." We continued on our way. When we were in the middle of the field, with no cover, the men opened a heavy and uncomfortably accurate fire on us.

"You're right, George," I yelled, and started to run. The ground was dry and every bullet kicked up a little cloud of dust, but we kept going and finally got out of the field and behind the crest of a small hill. Just then we saw more soldiers ahead of us.

George said, "Now we *have* had it. Don't be a bloody fool any more, John. Let's pack in." But this time I was right. They turned out to be John Pooley and a party from his troop.

We joined forces and all got into a very deep ditch and lay down—all except George, who moved around cautioning the men against smoking or talking. We resigned ourselves to a long wait until dark.

From time to time, parties of enemy soldiers passed us on patrol. They did not, however, look in the ditch. Had they done so, they would have had a very warm reception. The day passed quickly and, when night fell, we left the ditch to continue our ten-mile march to safety.

The first two miles, through olive groves, were the most tiring: we had to march bending over all the way, for the branches were thick and low. When we came to the Agnone-Lentini road, we were challenged by an enemy post just as John Pooley dashed across the road.

"Give us some covering fire!" I yelled to John. It was a bright, moonlit night, and I saw him throw his last grenade with great accuracy to the door of the post. It failed to explode. We ran across the road in groups of two or three. Each time there was a brief burst of enemy fire. Again we were lucky, and none of us was hit.

The rest of the way was plain walking—but plenty of it. Finally, we reached an Eighth Army anti-aircraft position. The last thing I remember before falling asleep was George Herbert draping a borrowed greatcoat over me.

### Monty Renames Bridge

I saw General Dempsey the next day. "I'm sorry we didn't manage to hold on until 50 Div. caught up," I apologized.

He smiled. "You had no chance of doing that. You did a great job. There's no doubt it relieved the weight of the attack on us enormously—the way you cut the lines of enemy communications for so long."

A little later, after Catania had fallen, Monty called me around to his headquarters. "Slater," he said, "that was a classic operation: classic. I want you to get the best stone-mason in town. I want you to get him to engrave 'No. 3 Commando Bridge' on a good piece of stone. Have this stone built into the masonry of the bridge."

I was delighted to obey Monty's order; and doubly delighted to hear that Charlie Head had been rescued and was now safely in a British Army hospital.

*NEXT WEEK: We land on the Italian coast and capture a town*

## THE FIVE TOWNS

*Continued from page 9*

Fenton cricket eleven, Frank Green was captain of the team.

A wraith of smoke steals from the top of one of the curving kilns, thickening till it forms a black stream. And the street reads the message that Kitchener Ridgeway is "baiting" again.

Kitchener Ridgeway, a white-overalled figure, tall and lean for a Five Towns man, is the fireman on the "biscuit" ovens, king of the warm cavern round their mouths, chief alchemist, transmuting, with the fierceness of his flame, soft grey clay into hard translucent "biscuit" (crockery still in the unglazed state) that rings like a bell.

This man's life revolves around the rhythm of his ovens. Today, after cooling for three days, one of them is being opened and emptied. High ladders stretch up into the smoke-blackened interior, a vast vault, as the "placers" and "odd men" lift down the big, round, brown earthenware saggars in which the ware is stowed. It will take eight men a whole day to empty the kiln.

### The Heat Builds Up

The opposite kiln, its load of ware stacked in position, was lit-off the night before, and now, as more coal—another baiting—is fed to the fires, the flames lick up the long hole the placers have left in the middle between the high brown pillars of saggars. The body of heat builds up behind the rotund walls.

For the last forty-eight hours the fireman does not leave the side of his kilns. Crockery worth a thousand pounds or more, the labour of some hundred people, depends on his skill and experience. Too much heat too quickly applied, and the ware nearest the fire may warp. "Just like roast beef that's burned outside, but half raw inside," explains Kitchener Ridgeway. Too little heat, on the other hand, and the china will not gain translucence, will be contemptuously rejected as "wood."

A fireman, says Ridgeway, needs to be able to trust his men. He needs "setterers" scrupulously accurate in positioning the big plates in their beds of white alumina powder so that they cannot twist under the heat. He needs placers who always take care in filling and piling up saggars. He needs stokers he can rely on.

Ridgeway told me these things as we sat in his little bunkhouse by the side of the ovens, with the coloured pictures of the canaries and budgerigars that are his hobby plastered over the white-washed walls. He first came here as a boy of fourteen to help his father, who was fireman before him—like *his* father before him. Kitchener's brother, Marshal, also works around the kilns.

### Family Is The Fabric

That is the way it is in the Five Towns. From the Spodes and Mintons in their family vaults in Stoke churchyard, from the ten generations of Wedgwoods, to the newest paintress straight from school, family is the fabric of the pot-banks.

Mrs. Bell, in the flower-room, deftly rolling the bits of clay that in a moment, under her hands, will become the petals of a hawthorn flower, sits where her father sat before her, fashioning, perhaps, the first pottery roses in the Five Towns. Her brother works on the "glost" oven. It is a pattern repeated times without number.

Gently, Mrs. Bell presses her hawthorn blossom into place on the top of a muffin-plate cover. That's how the Americans like it. But most of the time, as in her father's day, it is roses, anemones, carnations . . . roses, anemones, carnations. . . . There's a new department on the next bench, though—a newly modelled hibiscus blossom, an order for a customer in Hawaii that "Mr. Sam" brought back on his last visit to the States.

Sam and Frank Green are the fourth generation. Indeed, you can read the history of the business in the very building—the piece that dates from 1801, the extensions added in 1902, the most

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All over the Five Towns today you see such incongruities—a panel of modern glass bricks built into one corner of an ancient smoke-grimed building; a streamlined front office grafted on to a Dickensian background. But—as you ultimately will at the Greens'—occasionally you see complete new buildings, too. For this is not the old Five Towns improvisation. This is a revolution, the Industrial Revolution, not the first, but the second, not steam power's, but electricity's, catching up with the Potteries at last.

Its instrument is a modest enough thing—the electric, or gas-fired, tunnel oven. You'll see one today handling the second baking process at Greens'—after the glaze and the decoration have been put on. The pots ranged on neat racks, the touch of a switch and, slowly, they are moving into, and around, a grey-painted circular steel oven.

### Famous Skyline Changes

No days of "placing" in the towering saggars, no tricky firing, no smoke. . . . Everywhere, the new tunnel ovens are displacing the old kilns. And, as one by one the kilns come down, slowly the famous skyline of the Five Towns is changing. The smoke pall lifts. . . .

Yet it isn't so simple, quite, as that. To replan the pot-banks to the techniques of the twentieth century calls for much rebuilding. Rebuilding demands space—and space is hard to come by. In the Five Towns it really does seem that the only course is to wipe the slate clean and start again.

One famous concern has done just that. There is a certain historical aptness in the story: it is a revolution in a tradition.

When Josiah Wedgwood was christened in Burslem Parish Church in July, 1730, North Staffordshire was still a remote wilderness known outside only for its red earthenware butter-pots in which butter from the country reached the capital. When he died in 1795, Wedgwood's North Staffordshire cream-coloured "Queen's Ware" was famous the world over.

Physically, too, Wedgwood had put the area on the map by agitating till he secured the digging of a canal linking east and west coasts, Trent and Mersey. Leaving the old family pot-bank at Burslem, he then built a fine factory in the country between Hanley and Newcastle. This, classically inspired, he named "Etruria."

### A Portrait Of Tomorrow?

Today, smoke-grimed, jostled by coal mines, slag-heaps, iron works and other pot factories, Etruria is subsiding into the devastated area around it. But the historic factory is empty: no smoke rises from its blackened kilns. For Wedgwood have moved once more — out into the countryside five miles south of Stoke.

The Barlaston factory is a low, wide-spreading building of glass and concrete. It was to have been a factory in a garden city—but the war stopped the house-building.

Here, claim Wedgwood, is the most modern pot factory in Europe. The ware goes swinging through the light white halls on conveyors. Stacked trollies move through the long twin electric tunnel ovens with the regularity of suburban trains. Music mingles with the whirr of the jollies, as each semi-automatic machine scoops out two hundred dozen cups a day.

Is this, then, the tomorrow around the corner for the Potteries? Will the lead given by the Wedgwoods of 1953 prove as fruitful as that of their great ancestor, two hundred years ago?

Perhaps. But the Five Towns are not bound to like it.

Ask Dick Billington and his seventy-three year old father—in his sixty-second year at Wedgwood—as they sit side by side at their bench in the new Barlaston factory. Grey clay "Coronation" teapots are deployed in orderly ranks in front of them. They are "big handlers" (as distinct from mere "cup handlers," who are girls). Their job is to pierce the holes in the teapots, to press on the handles and the spouts, precisely in line. It is a job which calls for precision, delicacy of touch, neatness.

Trees move in the wind outside the window. You could put out your hand and almost touch a grass bank. There is not a wisp of smoke, a suspicion of grime. Yet . . . well, the Billingtons liked the old place. In that old honeycombed factory the first famous Wedgwood built, they had a little shop to themselves. You could make cocoa, even fry a bit of bacon and cheese, on the fire. Now, of course, its regulation tea, at the tea-break. . . . Oh, yes, it's all very nice for these young paintresses and such like . . . but, well. . . .

North Staffordshire is full of such last-ditchers; but they will die in their last ditches in vain. The Five Towns have had a good innings, but now the march of progress has caught up with them and, like the rest of us, they will have to learn to put up with it.

The signs are unmistakable. Family bonds loosen in the pot-banks. The sinister words, "London syndicate," are heard in the land. In Longton there is at work a fully automatic plate-making juggernaut which peels off 1,800 pieces an hour.

Why, the young people are even getting a little self-conscious about the grime and unrelieved squalor. There has been an outbreak of flower planting—on roundabouts, in front of pot-banks; on bits of derelict ground. Even the slag-heaps are on the Five Towns' conscience, now. A reader wrote to the *Sentinel* with the long-awaited solution: they must, he said, be clothed with greenery, by grass-seed, scattered from helicopters.

### Railways Kept Away

In a burst of Coronation year abandon, the Corporation launches into a scheme to convert a stretch of disused canal into a bosky glen. It was just such canals that put the Potteries on the map. But the Five Towns can live to the tempo of the canal age no longer.

The rot began, as Arnold Bennett told in *The Old Wives' Tale*, with the steam trams that linked up the old and dignified town of Burslem, the mother of the Five Towns, with the up-and-coming Hanley. It spread when the steam trams were succeeded by electric trams, clanging and crashing all the way through from "Neck-end" to Tunstall, in the far north.

But, thanks to the objections of the royal and ancient borough of Newcastle, which had long looked down from a great height on its rough, clay-coated neighbour, the railways were compelled to give the area a wide berth. Travel to the Five Towns retained a Darkest Africa flavour till around 1935, when the North Staffordshire line was modernized.

But now there are four London expresses a day—and all hope is dead.

The pawnbroker's shop on a Hope Street corner, where Arnold Bennett was born, is "The Vale Bar" now, with a gaudy juke-box between its

# DOWN YOUR GARDEN

## with RICHARD DIMBLEBY

### "Shuffle" sowing

To close drills without disturbing the seed I use a "shuffle board" 15 in. long, 4 in. wide and 1 in. thick. A piece of tin 3 in. wide is nailed inside a V cut at one end. I secure the board to my boot by thong or strong cord, and as I shuffle over the drills, the V efficiently closes them. The board also marks the drills for early hoeing.—J. F. RACE, Ipswich, Suffolk.

### Golden hedges

My non-flowering shrubs and hedges always bloom, for I plant golden gleam nasturtium seed (trailing variety) close by, and when the runners are long enough I twine them in and out of the branches. Nasturtiums flower into late autumn, when shrubs are no longer at their best. The more I pick for indoor decoration, the more blooms I get.—ETHELINDE YELLAND, Falmouth, Devon.

### Hearty cabbages

I induce weak cabbages to form hearts by making an incision with a sharp knife not more than halfway through the stalk just below the lowest leaves. Then I insert a matchstick to keep the cut open. The effect of this is to divert sap from the centre of the cabbage head. This gives the outer leaves the strength to hold, nurture and form a good solid heart.—K. MOORE, Leeds, 3, Yorkshire.

*Richard Dimbleby's final selection of "Down Your Garden" hints from readers will appear in John Bull next week*

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three tables, and a grip test machine on the counter ("Average Grip: Banker, 310; Sailor, 470"). Television aerials as well as pottery kilns rise above the shabby cottages.

But, for all that, so far the change has been slight enough. In Burslem itself the golden angel on that remarkable town hall—if a rather greyish angel by now—still extends her hands in lofty blessing over a scene instantly recognizable to any reader of Bennett. One would hardly be surprised to see Denry Machin drive up in his mule-cart with the Countess of Chell on the seat alongside him.

What The Card would make of the law society, with its free legal aid service, next door to Ellis, Ellis and Boulton, is anybody's guess; but certainly he would pause to read with quickening interest the written handbill in a shop window, announcing the trip to Southport arranged by the Port Vale supporters' club, lately set on its feet again by a retired Burslem brewery worker named Harry Myatt.

And in Myatt's hope of one day covering in the new ground's stalls—thus preserving supporters from being either soaked to the skin or seduced by Stoke City—The Card would undoubtedly find a field of patriotic endeavour after his own heart.

Round the corner, not far down Waterloo Road (Trafalgar Road in Bennett) the latest line in fancy waistcoats still dangles from the rail in Shillitoe's—where Denry Machin and Edwin Clayhanger embarked on their sartorial careers, and where indeed the fastidious Bennett still came for his own suits to the time of his death. Shillitoe himself—his real name was Jennings—died in 1938, but his business is still carried on by his two sons, who only a couple of years ago produced an astrakhan-collared overcoat for "The Card," alias Alex Guinness.

Not that Arnold Bennett is any great hero in the Five Towns, where they take the view that if Bennett brought them fame, they did about as much for Bennett. It is principally to appease the unpredictable foreigner who is always turning up in Hanley demanding to see "the Bennett house," that the corporation has finally bought the terra cotta villa where Bennett lived as a youth, and is planning to furnish a few rooms with "lace curtains and sashes, bamboo music-stands, anti-macassars, and that sort of thing."

In fact, Bennett already has his museum in the Five Towns, a series of collectors' items that can never be equalled, the living museum of Burslem. For though Burslem still carries itself with an air, and is indeed the only one of the Five Towns that has the look and feel of a real community, it is that eerie and rather pathetic thing, a mummified town. "I don't know," says Harry Myatt, sadly, "after federation everything seemed to go dead. There's only one town in the Potteries now, though you dursn't say so, and that's Hanley."

### The Smoke Is Lifting

The ashes of Enoch Arnold Bennett, that elegant man about town, lie in his mother's grave in the cemetery at Burslem. A hundred yards away rises the great conical slag heap of the Sneyd colliery. To the southward stretches a Five Towns vista of rooftops, kilns, tattered fields, slag heaps, grey under a canopy of smoke.

But the smoke is lifting. An era Bennett chronicled, and whose end he foreshadowed, is ending—as it ended long ago in other parts of Britain.

The cry of "Good Old Burslem!" still finds its echo in ten thousand hearts, staunchly anti-federationist to the last. But in the dark and deserted streets beneath the golden angel's outstretched hands, the sad truth is visible, night after night. For the people of Burslem, for the people of all the Five Towns in 1953, as for the rest of us, life begins—and too often ends—in the bus queue. THE END

*A further article in this series will appear shortly*

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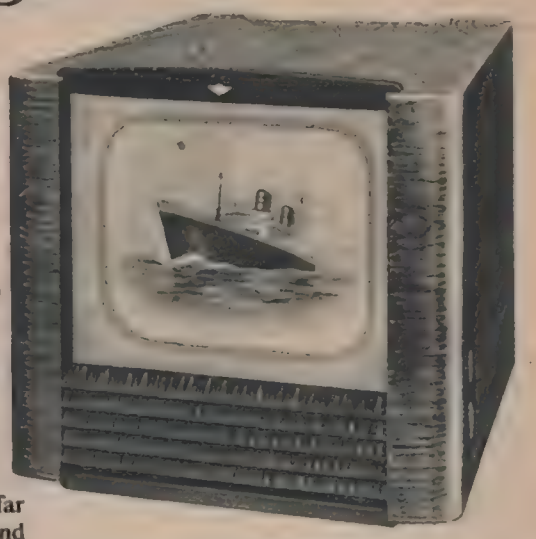

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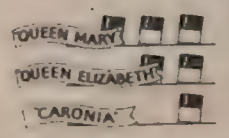


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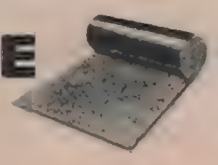


"Well, we're one. Now to establish *which* one"

## EXIT MISS ROBINSON

*Continued from page* 11

is scarcely ever anybody who *does* know what we mean."

She waited, but he said no more. She bustled about, getting tea, and he sat like a small boy trying to screw up courage to confess that he has been at the jam.

Across her teacup Miss Robinson said: "In your letter you said you wanted to see me alone?"

"Oh, yes." Old Percy looked more ill at ease than ever. He put his cup down and fumbled for words to begin.

Miss Robinson said gently: "Mr. Instone. That first time we met in the Copper Kettle. I knew you knew. It has puzzled me why you have kept on coming, since you were hostile from the first. And why you said nothing."

"Hostile? Oh dear! Did it seem like that?" Old Percy didn't know where to look.

SHE opened her desk and took out the tattered magazine, which fell open at the only page that had been looked at for years. She said, when he had read the paragraph to which she pointed, "I don't suppose there is anybody else on earth who remembers what happened to *Merry Miss Maud*. Or cares. I never claimed I was Sylvia Patten. It was a fool of a daily help I had. She saw a little and guessed the rest. I've always told them I was just Miss Robinson. I ought to have stopped it at the start, but you'd be surprised at the difference there was."

"Difference?"

"After being nobody at all," Miss Robinson answered. "Suddenly I was Somebody, with a capital letter. It was rather nice. After being absolutely disregarded."

She smiled at the memory of her short reign.

"You see, I was never really any good on the stage, and it was all rather flattering. I never got the applause when I thought I deserved it. Now, all at once, it came when I wasn't expecting it."

She caught him looking again at the silver-framed photograph.

"Oh, I *was* in *Merry Miss Maud*," she said. "Lead, too. I didn't make things up. I was Sylvia's understudy. I took over when she left us. We lasted a week. That's the sort of sensation I made!"

Old Percy said: "Do *you* know why she walked out of the show?"

"Oh yes," said Miss Robinson. "*I* knew. I had a letter from her. She simply ran off to be married. He was one of these jealous men—he hated the stage and her career. He just snatched her out of it all and took her away. Then I suppose it didn't matter twopence whether anybody knew or not. In any case, they'd gone abroad. South Africa or somewhere. Then she just faded out and it wasn't news any more."

"South America it was," said Mr. Instone.

"One of those places," Miss Robinson agreed. Then, quickly: "How do you know?"

"I was the man she married," said Old Percy.

"Well!" was all Miss Robinson could think of to say. She sat staring at him until he knew he was being stared at, then reached for his cup and filled it. "What a fool you must have thought me! And . . . Sylvia?"

"She died twelve years ago. In South America. As Mrs. Instone she was very happy," Old Percy said simply.

"I'm glad," said Miss Robinson. "She tried to help me many a time. I wasn't cut out for it, that's all."

Old Percy, smiling, said: "You made a success of it at last."

"No wonder you were—curious!"

"But not hostile," he repeated. "That isn't the word at all. Just puzzled. And then I got used to it—and I thought perhaps it was lucky it had happened that way. I mean, it wouldn't please me if it all just came to an end."

"But I can't keep on!" Miss Robinson protested. "Not *now*."

"What I really mean," he went on hastily, "is that since you took over Sylvia's part once, perhaps you would care to do it again."

MISS ROBINSON felt that she ought to be just a little startled at what he had said, but she wasn't.

"It doesn't seem very romantic, I know," he went on, "but we're just a tiny bit too old for that kind of thing, aren't we? We shouldn't have too long, I suppose, but it would be for us to make the best of it, wouldn't it?"

"Here comes Miss Fitch—hours before her time," said Miss Robinson. "She's like that. But she's a dear. Goodness knows what she'd say."

"There'll be such a lot of things to do and talk over," Mr. Instone said quickly. "When shall I be seeing you again?"

"Tomorrow morning, as usual, in the Copper Kettle?"

"Positively Her Last Appearance?"

Miss Robinson smiled. "I suppose I was born to be an understudy," she said.

The only one who really misses her and wonders sometimes why she went so suddenly and where she has got to is the editor of the local *Advertiser*.

He feels that somewhere he has missed a very good story. A London story.

THE END

## AFTER THE FUNERAL

*Continued from page 19*

kind, you'd say, to have enemies or anything melodramatic of that kind. Wedding cake through the post. Sounds like some jealous woman—but who'd be jealous of Miss Gilchrist? Doesn't seem to fit."

"No."

"Well, I must be on my way. I don't know what's happening to us in quiet little Lytchett St. Mary. First a brutal murder, and now attempted poisoning through the post. Odd, the one following the other."

He went down the path to his car. The cottage felt stuffy and Susan left the door standing open as she went slowly upstairs to resume her task.

Cora Lansquenet had not been a methodical woman. Her chests of drawers held a miscellaneous assortment of things. There were toilet accessories and letters and old handkerchiefs and paint brushes mixed up together in one drawer. There were a few old letters and bills thrust in among a bulging drawer of underclothes. In another drawer, under some woollen jumpers, was a cardboard box holding two false fringes of hair. There was another drawer full of old photographs and sketching books. Susan lingered over a group taken evidently at some French place many years ago and which showed a younger, thinner Cora clinging to the arm of a tall, lanky man with a straggling beard dressed in what seemed to be a velveteen coat and whom Susan took to be the late Pierre Lansquenet.

The photographs interested Susan, but she laid them aside, sorted all the papers she had found into a heap and began to go through them methodically. About a quarter of the way through she came on a letter. She read it through twice and was still staring at it when a voice speaking behind her caused her to start violently and give a cry of alarm.

"And what may you have got hold of there, Susan?"

SUSAN reddened with annoyance. Her cry of alarm had been quite involuntary and she felt ashamed and anxious to explain.

"George! How you startled me!"

Her cousin smiled. "So it seems."

"How did you get here?"

"Well, the door downstairs was open, so I walked in. If you mean how did I get to this part of the world, I started down this morning to come to the funeral."

"I didn't see you there."

"The old bus played me up. The petrol feed seemed choked. I tinkered with it for some time and finally it seemed to clear itself. It was too late for the funeral by then, but I thought I might as well come on down. I knew you were here. Greg told me. I spoke to him on the phone."

She asked: "Why did you really come down here, George?"

"I'm not sure it wasn't to do a little detective work. I've been thinking a good deal about the last funeral we attended. Aunt Cora certainly threw a spanner into the works that day. I've wondered whether it was sheer irresponsibility and auntly *joie de vivre* that prompted her words, or whether she really had something to go upon. What actually is in that letter that you were reading so attentively when I came in?"

Susan said slowly: "It's a letter that Uncle Richard wrote to Cora after he'd been down here to see her."

How very black George's eyes were. She'd thought of them as brown but they were black, and there was something curiously impenetrable about black eyes. They concealed thoughts that lay behind them.

George drawled slowly: "Anything interesting in it?"

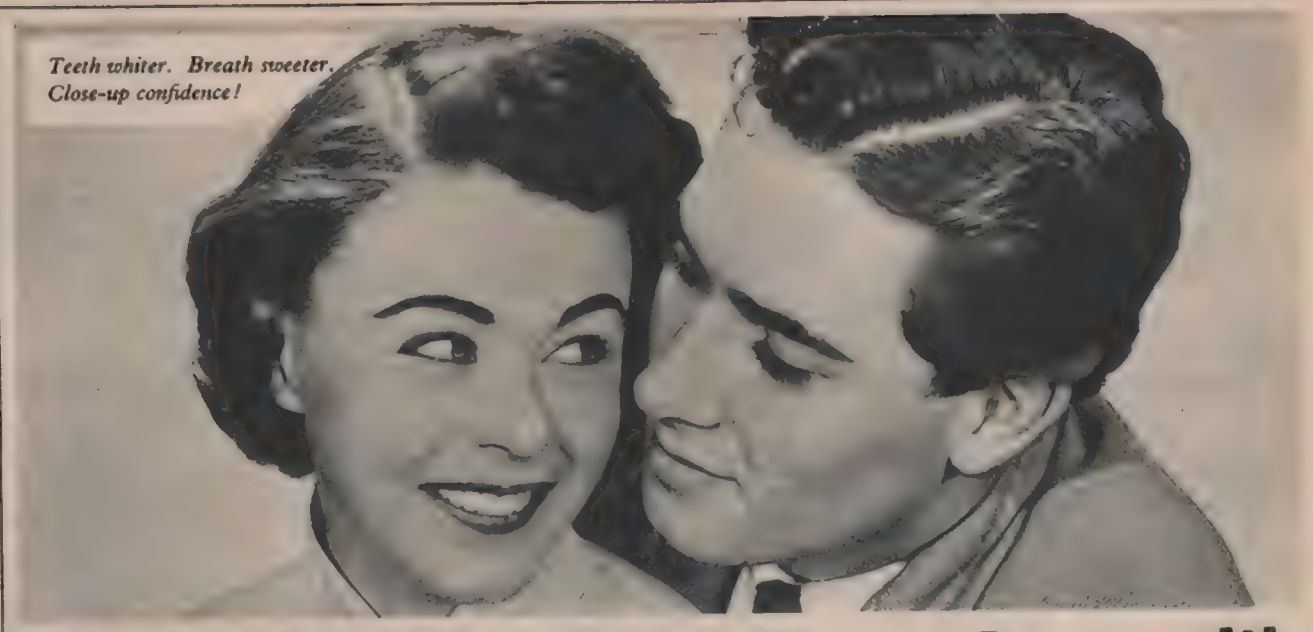
"No, not exactly. . . ."

"Can I see?"

She hesitated for a moment, then put the letter into his outstretched hand.

He read it, skimming over the contents in a low monotone.

*"Glad to have seen you again after all these years . . . looking very well . . . had a good journey home*

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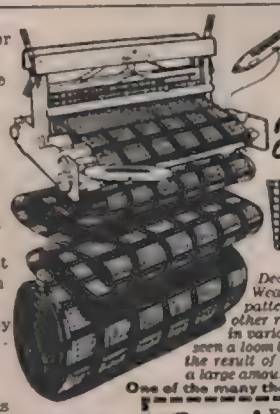

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*and arrived back not too tired. . . .*" His voice changed suddenly, sharpened: "*Please don't say anything to anyone about what I told you. It may be a mistake. Your loving brother, Richard.*"

He looked up at Susan. "What does that mean?"

"It might mean anything. It might be just about his health. Or it might be some gossip about a mutual friend."

"Oh, yes, it might be a lot of things. It isn't conclusive—but it's suggestive. . . . What did he tell Cora? Does anyone know what he told her?"

"Miss Gilchrist might know," said Susan thoughtfully. "I think she listened."

"Oh, yes, the companion-help. Where is she, by the way?"

"In hospital, suffering from arsenic poisoning."

George stared. "You don't mean it?"

"I do. Someone sent her some poisoned wedding cake."

George sat down on one of the bedroom chairs and whistled.

"It looks," he said, "as though Uncle Richard was not mistaken."

On the following morning, Inspector Morton called at the cottage. He was a quiet, middle-aged man with a soft country burr in his voice. His manner was quiet and unhurried, but his eyes were shrewd.

"You realize what this is about, Mrs. Banks?" he said. "Doctor Barton has already told you about Miss Gilchrist. The few crumbs of wedding cake that he took from here have been analysed and show traces of arsenic."

"So somebody deliberately wanted to poison her?"

"That's what it looks like. You can't throw any light on the matter?"

Susan shook her head.

"I'm simply dumbfounded," she said. "Can't you find out anything from the postmark? Or the handwriting?"

"You've forgotten — the wrapping paper was presumably burnt. And there's a little doubt whether it came through the post at all. Young Andrews, the driver of the postal van, doesn't seem able to remember delivering it."

"But—what's the alternative?"

"The alternative, Mrs. Banks, is that an old piece of brown paper was used that already had Miss Gilchrist's name and address on it and a cancelled stamp, and that the package was pushed through the letter box or deposited inside the door to create the impression it had come by post."

Susan said slowly: "Miss Gilchrist speculated a good deal about who could have sent it, but she wasn't at all suspicious. As you say, she was pleased and—yes—flattered. Was there enough poison in it to—kill?"

"That's difficult to say until we get the quantitative analysis. It rather depends on whether Miss Gilchrist ate the whole of the wedge. She seems to think that she didn't. Can you remember?"

"No—no, I'm not sure. She offered me some and I refused and then she ate some and said it was a very good cake, but I don't remember if she finished it or not."

"I'd like to go upstairs if you don't mind, Mrs. Banks."

"Of course."

SUSAN followed him up to Miss Gilchrist's room. She said apologetically: "I'm afraid it's in a rather disgusting state. But I thought perhaps I ought to leave it as it was."

"That was very intelligent of you, Mrs. Banks. It's not everyone who would have been so intelligent."

He went to the bed and, slipping his hand under the pillow, raised it carefully. A slow smile spread over his face. "There you are," he said.

A piece of wedding cake lay on the sheet, somewhat the worse for wear.

"How extraordinary," said Susan.

"Oh no, it's not. Perhaps your generation doesn't do it. But it's an old custom. Put a piece of wedding cake under your pillow and you'll dream of your future husband."

"But surely Miss Gilchrist——"

"She didn't want to tell us about it because she felt foolish doing such a thing at her age. But I had a notion that's what it might be." His face sobered. "And if it hadn't been for an old maid's foolishness, Miss Gilchrist mightn't be alive today."

"But who could have possibly wanted to kill her?"

His eyes met hers, a curious speculative look in them that made Susan feel uncomfortable.

"You don't know?" he asked.

"No—of course I don't."

"It seems then as though we shall have to find out," said Inspector Morton.

Two elderly men sat together in a room whose furnishings were of the most modern kind. There were no curves in the room. Everything was square. Almost the only exception was Hercule Poirot himself, who was full of curves. His stomach was pleasantly rounded, his head resembled an egg in shape, and his moustaches curved upwards in a flamboyant flourish.

He was sipping a glass of *sirop* and looking thoughtfully at Mr. Goby.

Mr. Goby was small and spare and shrunken. He had always been refreshingly nondescript in appearance and he was now so nondescript as practically not to be there at all. He was not looking at Poirot because Mr. Goby never looked at anybody. Such remarks as he was now making seemed to be addressed to the left-hand corner of the chromium-plated fireplace kerb.

Mr. Goby was famous for acquiring information quickly. Very few people knew about him and very few employed his services—but those few were usually extremely rich.

Mr. Goby had now practically retired from business. But he occasionally "obliged" a few old patrons. Hercule Poirot was one of these.

"I've got what I could for you," he told the fire kerb in a soft, confidential whisper. "I sent the boys out. They do what they can—good lads, good lads all of them, but not what they used to be in the old days. They don't come that way nowadays. Not willing to learn, that's what it is. Think they know everything after they've only been a couple of years on the job. And they work to time. Shocking the way they work to time."

He shook his head sadly and shifted his gaze to an electric plug socket.

"It's the government," he told it. "Everything organized now. Mind you"—Mr. Goby flung himself back in his chair and winked at a lampshade—"mustn't crab the government! Don't know really what we'd do without it. You can walk in anywhere nowadays with a notebook and pencil, dressed right and speaking B.B.C., and ask people all the most intimate details of their daily lives and all their back history, and what they had for dinner on November 23 because that was a test day for middle-class incomes—or whatever it happens to be."

Still talking to the lampshade, Mr. Goby went on: "Oh, I can tell you, M. Poirot, it's the best line we've ever had; much better than reading the electric meter or tracing a fault in the telephone—yes, or than calling as nuns or the girl guides or the boy scouts asking for subscriptions, though we use all those, too. Yes, government snooping is God's gift to us!"

Poirot did not speak. Mr. Goby had grown a little garrulous with advancing years, but he would come to the point in his own good time.

"Ah," said Mr. Goby and took out

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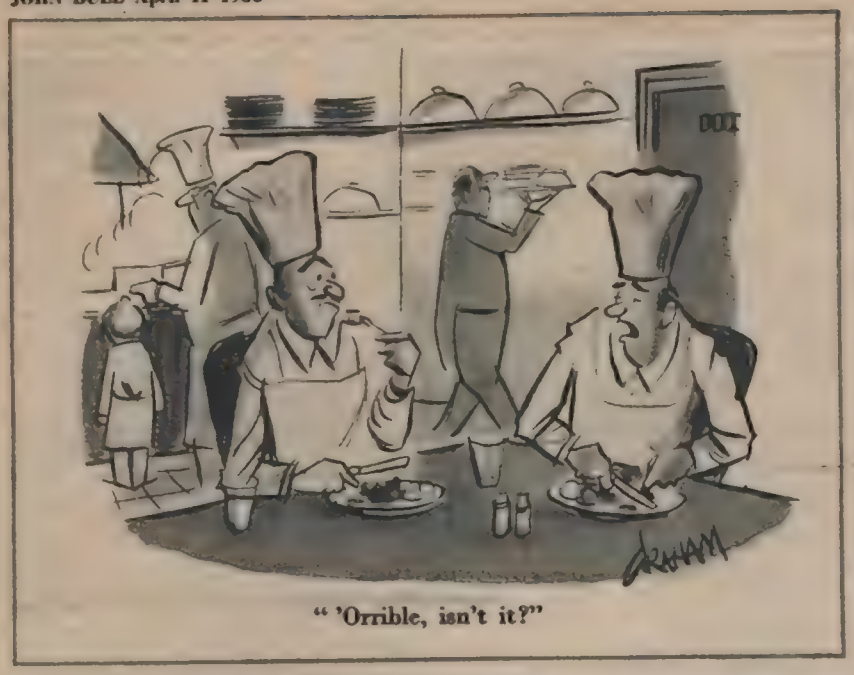
IN JOHN BULL NEXT WEEK




"'Orrible, isn't it?"

a very scrubby little notebook. He licked his finger and flicked over the pages. "Here we are. Mr. George Crossfield. We'll take him first. He's been in Queer Street for quite a while now. Horses mostly, and gambling—he's not a great one for women. Statement that he was at Hurst Park races on day in question almost certainly untrue. Almost invariably places bets with one or other of two bookies on the course. They didn't see him that day. Possible that he left Paddington by train for destination unknown. Taxi driver who took fare to Paddington made doubtful identification of his photograph. No success with porters at Paddington or Cholsey Station—which is nearest for Lytchett St. Mary. Could have got out at Reading and taken bus. Wasn't seen in Lytchett St. Mary."

MR. GOBY looked up for a moment. "Of course, he needn't have been. He was in the Dramatic Society at Oxford. If he went to the cottage that day he mayn't have looked quite like the usual George Crossfield."

Mr. Goby licked his finger and turned another page of his notebook. "Mr. Michael Shane, actor. Wants to star and wants to star quickly. Fond of money and doing himself well. Very attractive to women. He's been running around with Sorrel Dainton, who was playing the lead in the last show he was in. His wife doesn't know about it. Doesn't know much about anything, it seems. Not much of an actress, I gather, but easy on the eye. Crazy about her husband. Some rumour of a bust-up likely between them not long ago, but that seems out now. Out since Mr. Richard Abernethie's death." Mr. Goby emphasized the last point by nodding his head significantly at a cushion on the sofa.

"On the day in question, Mr. Shane says he was meeting a Mr. Rosenheim and a Mr. Oscar Lewis to fix up some stage business. He didn't meet them. Sent them a wire to say he couldn't make it. What he *did* do was to hire a car at about twelve o'clock. Returned about six in the evening. According to the speedometer it had been driven just about the right number of miles for what we're after. No confirmation from Lytchett St. Mary, but there are lots of places it could have been left unnoticed a mile or so away."

Mr. Goby rubbed his nose. "Mrs. Shane," he said. "She says she was shopping. Has one or two charge accounts but they're overdrawn and they've been pressing her for payment and she didn't put any more on the sheet.

"Mr. and Mrs. Banks—who said they were at home all day. *She* wasn't, anyway! Went round to the garage, got out her car and drove off in it about one o'clock. Destination unknown. Back about five. Can't tell about mileage because she's had it out every day since and it's been nobody's business to check.

"As to Mr. Banks, we've dug up something curious. To begin with, I'll mention that on the day in question we don't know *what* he did. He didn't go to work. Seems he'd already asked for a couple of days off on account of the funeral. And since then he's chucked his job. It was at a pharmacy. They're not too keen on Master Banks. Seems he used to get into rather queer, excitable states. His back history is interesting."

Mr. Goby gave a rare, direct look at Poirot. "Up till about four months ago—just before he met his wife—he was in a mental home. Not certified—just what they call a mental breakdown. Seems he made a slip in dispensing a medicine. He was working with a Mayfair firm then. The woman recovered, but afterwards, it seems, Banks got into a very low state. Said he was obsessed by guilt, that it had all been deliberate. The woman had been overbearing and rude to him when she came into the shop, had complained that her last prescription had been badly made up. Master Banks had resented this and had deliberately added a near lethal dose of some drug or other. He said, 'She had to be punished for daring to speak to me like that!' And then he wept and said he was too wicked to live and a lot of things like that. The medicos have a long word for that sort of thing—guilt complex or something—and don't believe it was deliberate at all, just carelessness, but that he wanted to make it important and serious."

"*Ça se peut*," said Hercule Poirot.

"Pardon? Anyway, he went into this sanatorium and they treated him and discharged him as cured, and he met Miss Abernethie, as she was then. And he got a job in this respectable but rather obscure little chemist's shop. Nothing against him there, but there is a story about a customer saying once as a joke, 'Wish you'd sell me something to poison my wife, ha, ha!' And Banks says to him, very soft and quiet: 'I could. . . . It would cost you two hundred pounds.' The man felt uneasy and laughed it off. Of course, it *may* have been all a joke, but it doesn't seem to me that Banks is the joking kind."

POIROT was appreciative. "*Mon ami*, it really amazes me how you get your information! Medical and highly confidential, most of it!"

Mr. Goby's eyes swivelled right round the room and he murmured, looking expectantly at the door, that there were *ways*. . . .

"Now we come to the country department. Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Abernethie. Very nice place they've got, but sadly needing money spent on it. Very straitened they seem to be, very straitened. Taxation and unfortunate investments. Mr. Abernethie enjoys ill health but eats hearty meals, and seems quite strong physically if he likes to make the effort."

Mr. Goby paused to investigate his notes more closely. "He was in a very bad temper the morning of the day

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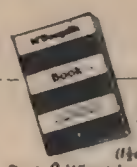


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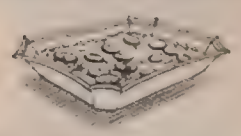

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after the funeral. Swore at Mrs. Jones, the daily woman. Ate only a little of his breakfast and said he wouldn't have any lunch. He was in a worse temper still the next day and said the supper she had left out for him was unfit to eat and a good deal more. He was alone in the house and unseen by anybody from nine thirty that morning until the following morning."

"And Mrs. Abernethie?"

"She started off from Enderby by car at the time you mentioned. Arrived on foot at a small local garage in a place called Cathstone and explained her car had broken down a couple of miles away. She arranged to stay the night at an inn, and asked for some sandwiches as she said she'd like to see something of the countryside—it's on the edge of the moorland country. She didn't come back to the inn till quite late that evening."

"And the times?"

"She got the sandwiches at eleven. If she'd walked to the main road, a mile, she could have hitch-hiked into Wallcaster and caught a special south coast express which stops at Reading West. It *could* just have been done if you could make the—er—attack fairly late in the afternoon."

"I understand the doctor stretched the time limit to possibly four thirty," said M. Poirot.

MR. GOBY shrugged. "Mind you," he said, "I shouldn't say it was likely. She seems to be a nice lady, liked by everybody and devoted to her husband. Treats him like a child. She's strong and hefty, chops the wood and often hauls in great baskets of logs. Pretty good with the inside of a car, too."

"I was coming to that. What exactly *was* wrong with the car?"

"It seems it was a difficult thing to spot. And also to put right. But it could have been done maliciously by someone without very much trouble. By someone who was familiar with the insides of a car."

"*C'est magnifique!*" said Poirot with bitter enthusiasm. "All so convenient, all so possible. *Bon dieu*, can we eliminate *nobody*? And Mrs. Leo Abernethie?"

"Mr. Abernethie, deceased, was very fond of her. She came there to stay about a fortnight before he died."

"After he had been to Lytchett St. Mary to see his sister?"

"No, just before. Her income is a good deal reduced since the war. She gave up her house in England and took a small flat in London. She has a villa in Cyprus and spends part of the year there. She has a young nephew whom she is helping to educate, and there seem to be one or two young artists whom she helps financially."

"St. Helen of the blameless life," said Poirot. "And it was quite impossible for her to have left Enderby that day without the servants knowing? Say that that is so, I implore you!"

Mr. Goby brought his glance across to rest apologetically on Poirot's polished patent leather shoe. "I'm afraid I can't say that, M. Poirot. Mrs. Abernethie went to London to fetch some extra clothes and belongings, as she had agreed with Mr. Entwhistle to stay on and see to things."

"*Il ne manquait que ça!*" said Poirot with strong feeling.

* * *

When the card of Inspector Morton of the Berkshire County Police was brought to Hercule Poirot, his eyebrows went up. "Show him in, Georges, show him in. And bring—what is it that the police prefer?"

"I would suggest beer, sir."

"How horrible! But how British! Bring beer, then."

Inspector Morton came straight to the point.

"I had to come to London," he said. "And I got hold of your address, M. Poirot. I was interested to see you at the inquest on Thursday."

M. Poirot inclined his head.

"You won't remember me, M. Poirot, but I remember you very well. In that Pangbourne case."

"Ah, you were connected with that?"

"Only in a very junior capacity. It's a long time ago, but I've never forgotten you."

"And you recognized me at once the other day?"

"That wasn't difficult, sir." Inspector Morton repressed a slight smile. "Your appearance is—rather unusual." His gaze took in Poirot's sartorial perfection and rested finally on the curving moustaches. "You stick out in a country place," he said.

"It is possible, it is possible," said Poirot with complacency.

THE inspector went on: "It interested me why you should be there. That sort of crime—robbery, assault—doesn't usually interest you."

"Was it the usual ordinary brutal type of crime?"

"That's what I've been wondering."

"You have wondered from the beginning, have you not?"

"Yes, M. Poirot. It wasn't what you'd call an 'ordinary' crime—we're quite sure of that. It was done by someone who wished to make it appear that way. It could have been the Gilchrist woman, but there doesn't seem to be any motive—and there wasn't any emotional background. Also, she has been poisoned herself."

Meticulously, in detail, he told of the poisoned wedge of wedding cake.

Poirot took a deep, hissing breath. "Ingenious—yes, ingenious. . . . I warned Mr. Entwhistle to look after Miss Gilchrist. An attack on her was always a possibility. But I must confess that I did not expect poison. I anticipated a repetition of the hatchet motif. I merely thought that it would be inadvisable for her to walk alone in unfrequented lanes after dark."

"But *why* did you anticipate an attack on her? I think, M. Poirot, you ought to tell me that."

"Yes," said Poirot, and paused. Georges had entered with a tall glass of beer.

"Some refreshment, Inspector. No, no, I insist."

"Won't you join me?"

"I do not drink the beer. But I will myself have a glass of *sirop de cassis*—the English, they do not care for it, I have noticed."

Inspector Morton looked gratefully at his beer.

Poirot, sipping delicately from his glass of dark purple fluid, said: "It begins, all this, at a funeral. Or rather, to be exact, *after the funeral*."

Graphically, with many gestures, he set forth the story as Mr. Entwhistle had told it to him, but with such embellishments as his exuberant nature suggested.

When he had finished, Inspector Morton said: "This Mr. Abernethie may have been poisoned?"

"It is a possibility."

"And the body has been cremated and there is no evidence?"

"Exactly."

The inspector ruminated. "Except perhaps the evidence Cora Lansquenet may have had—and she is dead."

"Quite," said Poirot softly. "We do not know, of course, to whom she might have told it—and perhaps her murderer does not know, either."

"Then the attack on Miss Gilchrist——"

"Was always indicated. After Cora is silenced, the murderer might continue to be anxious. Does the other woman know something—anything? Of course, if the murderer is wise he will let well alone, but murderers, Inspector, are seldom wise. They brood, they feel uncertain, they desire to make sure—quite sure. They are pleased with their own cleverness. And so, in the end, they protrude their necks, as you say."

Inspector Morton smiled faintly.

Poirot went on: "This attempt to silence Miss Gilchrist, already it is a mistake. For now there are *two* occasions about which you make inquiry. There is the handwriting on the wedding label also. It is a pity the wrapping paper was burnt."

"Yes, I could have been certain, then, whether it came by post or whether it didn't."

"You have reason for thinking the latter, you say?"

"It's only what the postman thinks—he's not sure. I've tested his memory and he isn't reliable in any way. If he *did* deliver it, it seems to me odd that the parcel shouldn't have been noticed until after this Mr.—what's his name? —Guthrie——"

"Ah, Mr. Guthrie."

INSPECTOR MORTON smiled. "Yes, M. Poirot. We're checking up on him. After all, it would be easy, wouldn't it, to come along with a plausible tale of having been a friend of Mrs. Lansquenet's. Mrs. Banks wasn't to know if he was or he wasn't."

He paused and then added: "And there are other possibilities."

Poirot nodded. "You think——?"

"Mr. George Crossfield was down in that part of the world—but not until the next day. Meant to attend the funeral, but had a little engine trouble on the way. Know anything about him, M. Poirot?"

"I have accumulated a little information about him and about others. It is at your disposal. Naturally *I* have no authority to ask these people questions. In fact it would not be wise for me to do so."

"I shall go slowly myself. You don't want to fluster your bird too soon. But when you do fluster it, you want to fluster it well."

"A very sound technique. For you, then, my friend, the routine—with all the machinery you have at your disposal. It is slow—but sure. For myself——"

"Yes, M. Poirot?"

"For myself, I go north. Yes, a little preparatory camouflage—and I go north. . . . I intend," he added, "to purchase a country mansion for foreign refugees. I represent U.N.A.R.C.O."

"And what's U.N.A.R.C.O.?"

"United Nations Aid for Refugee Centres Old Age. It sounds well, do you not think? I shall play the rôle magnificently."

Inspector Morton grinned. He believed him. He would very much like to see M. Poirot playing it.

*To be continued next week*

# LIFE WITH MOTHER

ARRIVING into the world, I presented my mother with a major problem. She had, I think, a great future ahead of her. She had been a brilliant student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art; from there she went straight to the West End, and was already at the top of the bills before I was born.

But she felt she could not continue with her career and devote herself to my upbringing at the same time. It had to be one or the other. She decided in favour of me.

We lived in a Georgian house in Great Missenden, Bucks, with a few acres of land where she kept poultry and pigs, and a donkey for me. My earliest memories are of her in top boots and an old coat, going out with buckets of chicken food.

She was an excellent spin bowler, and her cricket coaching helped enormously when I went to school. Every summer we drove to Northumberland to spend our holidays with her sister, who had four daughters, and another aunt, E. H. Young, the novelist.

There were some pretty wild games on the beach, but Mother held her own; I was thirteen years old before I could touch her in a hundred-yard sprint.

And she was tough. Once she twisted her ankle and sat in agony, nursing it. "Mummy," I shouted impatiently. "Would you mind getting off the pitch?"

Without a word she got up and limped off. It was only later that I saw how her foot had swollen.

Only as an adult did I really appreciate all she had done for me as a child. I kept rabbits, guinea-pigs, dogs, cats, a tortoise, birds and seven tanks of fish, all of which I would leave her to look after when I went to school. My letters would read: "Susie, the white rabbit, is going to have babies. Please see that she gets cream every day."

After a week of broadcasting—she had begun her second career, as a radio actress, in 1926—she spent her Sundays cleaning out the fish tanks. I remember saying some very bitter things once, when I came home from school to find that a

goldfish had died. How we take our mothers for granted!

The question of my own career was always in her mind. I was five when I was sent to a pantomime she produced in the village hall. Every now and then she peeped through the curtains to observe my reaction, noting with a certain reluctant satisfaction that I was sitting glumly impassive throughout the show. But when she got home later she found me with all my toy animals in the nursery, "producing" them in a pantomime of my own.

Despite her own success, she never wanted me to be even remotely connected with the stage. But when I returned from France, where I had spent a year after leaving school, I found that a girl friend of mine was in a show. So I got a stage job myself—and that was the end of my studies.

Very slowly, Mother withdrew her opposition. But she was greatly relieved when I later turned to producing.

She was an indulgent mother. I was given most of the toys I wanted, but I remember longing for a Noah's Ark and being prevented by my nurse from asking Mother for it. Years later, when we happened to be in a toyshop, I mentioned my childhood frustration.

"Never mind," said Mother, her eyes twinkling. "I'll get you one now!" But I had grown out of Noah's Arks.

*Who are the famous mother and son? For their names—and the complete photograph—turn to page 35*

STOMACH TROUBLE?

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## VOLCANO

*Continued from page 14*

hadn't believed her when she said she was leaving because he had no life to share with her. This morning, the truth of it rose in clarity out of his tiredness. He had stood alone for too long, and he was going to fail.

"Mr. Worrand! You're not asleep, are you? Drink this." Dessie Rawlinson, his secretary, was beside him, offering a cup of tea.

He took the cup, and bestowed a pat of gratitude on the girl's wrist. Her arm was cool, and that, he thought with detachment, was just part of her efficiency. She had been with him for five months, and had done everything except get on well with Lyn. But none of the Aitangi crowd had got on friendly terms with Lyn.

He said: "Keep trying to raise Aitangi on the radio, will you, Dess? They should check with us about receiving our evacuees. I'm going to see how Hendrick is getting the strip fixed for the transport planes. Want me to take him a message?"

She passed him his sun helmet. "Message? Why should I?" Her voice was disinterested.

"You used to play a lot of tennis with him at Aitangi, when he should have been discovering oil."

"Perhaps I've grown up since then."

He looked at her, smiling absent-mindedly, and then she walked away, striding down the hill through the dust-heavy kunai grass.

A hospital marquee had been pitched so that one shoulder of hill lay between it and the head of the valley, from which a scorched and boulder-strewn slope led up to Mount Commando, four miles away. If Commando blew up again, there would be some shelter from the first blast, at least. A few small tents stood near the hospital, and a litter of stores and salvage. And, almost as inanimate, the lines of natives, crouched in misery, the bandages vivid against their dark bodies.

The lines grew murmurous at Worrand's approach. He gave them reassuring words in their own dialects, and was aware of them relaxing. But they would bend to fear, like grass to the lightest wind.

He went on, to the sloping valley floor. It served as an air-strip, and was just workable for uphill landings and downhill take-offs by light craft. At the top of the field a small charter plane was warming up to take the pressmen out to Lae. At the lower end was a patch of tall jungle growth. Two tractors linked by a steel hawser were flattening a swathe of the timber, and a bulldozer was working with them.

BILL HENDRICK drove the bulldozer. When Worrand waved, he cut the motor and sat waiting impatiently. His body was shirtless and smoothly hard, and his dark eyes were hard, too, when he pulled off the tinted glasses and nodded curtly.

"Let's keep it brief, Mr. Commissioner. That bastard's starting to spit again." He pointed up the valley.

The shimmer of steam over the volcano was thickening with a smoky flow from the crater. As Worrand looked, a few specks rose lazily into the cloud, reappeared, curving down as ton boulders. They hit the mountainside in artillery spouts of dust.

"When's your transportation due in?"

Worrand shook his head. "I haven't heard yet."

"For Pete's sake! I thought you had it organized. Suppose I haven't flattened enough of this brush before the crates want to land?"

Worrand's mouth tightened. Hendrick could not be slapped down for impertinence. He was an American, and the oil corporation which employed him had shipped his outfit into Australian New Guinea with a sheaf of priorities and recommendations from the government. The boy had been quick enough to bring up men and earth-moving machines from his drilling camp when the SOS came from the valley. But he hadn't brought the smooth manners he had used at Aitangi tennis teas and dances.

Suddenly, Worrand found himself wishing that he had more of the Hendrick type at the coast end of his radio today. It was the type that didn't wait for orders in a crisis.

He said: "The planes can get on to this field the way it is. It's for a take-off with full load they'll want a bit more space under 'em. Afraid we just have to improvise as fast as we can."

Hendrick reddened. "Guess you've got your hands full, running the whole show. I didn't mean to be rude."

"My dear chap, of course you mean to be rude," Worrand smiled. "Quite right, too. Must try it myself and get some action."

The charter plane began to move, its two small motors at a thin crescendo. It lifted sharply near the end of the grass strip and cleared the tree-tops with a few feet to spare.

"Pardon me while I shave off a mite more lumber," Hendrick said.

WORRAND nodded and turned away as the bulldozer stuttered into sound again. He had not walked far when he heard a new sound. A small biplane was coming in low. He could read the identification letters on the silvered fabric of the fuselage. It was the Tiger Moth that he used on routine work around his district.

He ran towards the field, waving his arms. The pilot hadn't sized up the problem of the uphill landing, and wasn't getting the Moth's tail down fast enough. The wheels hit too soon, and the plane bounced high. It was cushioned for a moment by a hastily gunned motor, then flopped to a safe but heavy landing. It taxied to the side of the runway and stopped. A slender figure in blue overalls climbed from the rear cockpit as Worrand came up.

He stared at her. Lyn!

She was here, when he had supposed her down in Australia and arranging for a divorce. His mind accepted it, suddenly, as a climax to all in her life with him that he had never understood. And now, when it was not important to understand, he knew that she had turned from his life in New Guinea because he had not known how to share it fully and dispel her fear of it.

She was leaning against the fuselage, pushing back the pale-gold hair from her brow.

"That rotten landing shocked you, Johnnie?" The old irony was in her husky voice. "Or didn't you know I was back? They told me at Aitangi they'd get a signal through."

He shook his head. "Last I heard, you were in Sydney."

Her vivid mouth curved to a smile. "Good deeds are for experts only; I should have known. I caught the mail plane up to Lae, when I read about this . . . this volcano affair. Appearances, I thought. Johnnie's career, and all that. Wife flies to be with

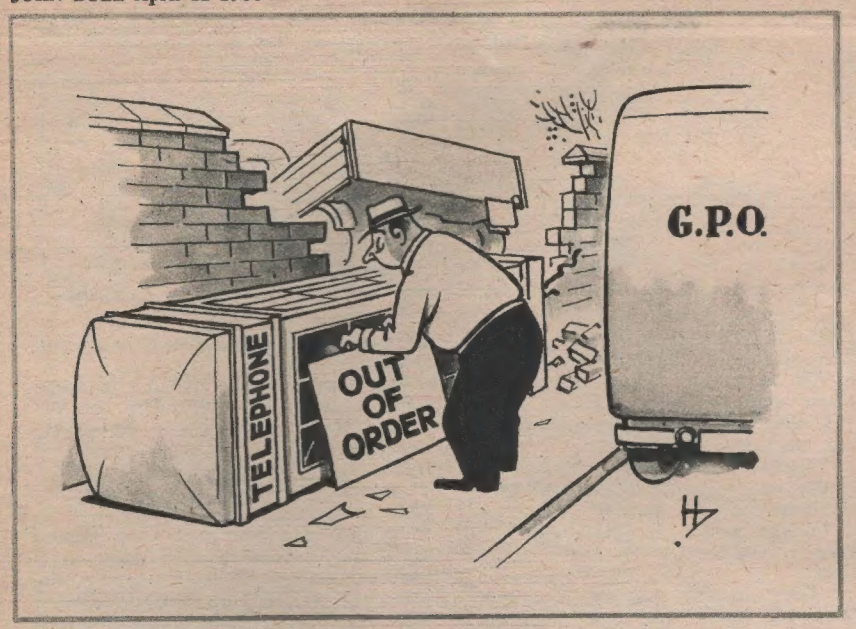
*THE HUMAN MACHINE*

## Waste material

**MISUSE and waste are the same thing. They are the source of most of the world's evils. This applies to mental and spiritual things as well as material. We can fritter away our powers on worthless things. We can let them rot through not using them at all. It's all waste—all misuse.**

**Pinched minds, half-alive minds are always wasteful. It's the alert and enthusiastic minds that are really alive and useful.**

*by ROFFE THOMPSON*




district commissioner. Please the government and silence the gossips."

"There's been no gossip, Lyn."

"Not that you'd hear. But your little clerks and deputy what-nots and their wives scuttled when I came back. As if I'd been the volcano. . . ." She turned towards Mount Commando. "It's going up again, isn't it?"

"I think so. Why did you do this? It was crazy to fly in by yourself."

"Everyone was so damn' polite and leisurely. It might have been two extra for lunch on Friday week instead of an emergency. I felt it could all go horribly wrong for you. Maybe I should have waited for the transports. I suppose they did tell you three transports are coming for your refugees?"

"Ten. I signalled yesterday for ten."

"You're getting three. That's all they have at Aitangi."

"Three! Good grief! They could have radioed Lae, Moresby—every damn' station. Why——"

"Why? Because you weren't there to take responsibility," she flashed. "Because their tin god commissioner always ran things himself. . . ."

She broke off. Worrand was looking at his watch. The lines on his face had a drawn bitterness. Lyn stretched a hand towards him. "That wasn't fair. How long is it since you slept, Johnnie?"

"There isn't time to talk." His tone made it clear that kindness from her would be the final, unendurable burden. "Better find some place and wait. My tent—anywhere . . ."

He turned and began to walk up the hill to the hospital. He could feel pumice dust round his eyes, and the thinnest of smoke mists had begun to drift down the valley, low and acrid. He saw Dessie running across the shoulder of hill to intercept him. He walked on until she called to him

"Mr. Worrand! Aitangi came through. They said the planes are on the way and should be over in another half-hour."

"Thank you, Dessie. How many?"

"Three, they said."

"I see."

"Is that your—it *is* Mrs. Worrand, over by that plane, isn't it?" Dessie stared, incredulity giving way to indignation. "Well! As if you hadn't enough——"

"Please! It was important that she came. They don't understand our situation, down at Aitangi. Take my wife up to my tent, will you? Give her some tea. I must talk to Sister Joan. Send a runner to tell Hendrick about the planes. Ask him to see me when he's through. We have to change our plans. I don't know how, yet. I've got to think." He turned away and began climbing the hill again.

There were no patient lines of natives outside the hospital now, but a crowd that surged and pointed to the darkening sky. Sergeant Monapu cleared a path for Worrand.

He went into the twilight of the hospital. The long tent smelt of ether and burnt flesh. Along the close-packed rows of the seriously hurt, the intermittent whispers of pain were beginning to fuse into a murmur of despair.

The white habit of Sister Joan loomed before Worrand. He read anxiety behind the set smile on her yellow, wrinkled face.

"Mr. Worrand, is it true that the planes will soon be here? We have all the patients ready to be moved out."

"I want you to select sixty. That's all they can take at one lift. It will be at least two hours before they can get back from Aitangi for a second load. By that time, things may be rather difficult here."

Sister Joan inclined her head. "I see. We shall stay, of course, with those who can't get away."

"You will not. The sisters must go out with the wounded to Aitangi. My police will round up everyone who can walk, and try to get them across the hills. The others you must entrust to me."

"Oh, but we couldn't——"

"I'm not arguing, Sister Joan. It's an order."

The doorway of the tent darkened. Lyn, Dessie and Hendrick came in. Blood was trickling from a cut above Hendrick's left eye.

"Our cable ripped," he said. "Nobody got hurt bad, but my boys figured it was time to quit. They just climbed off the tractors and went bush."

"He's hurt," Dessie insisted. "Could you do something, please, Sister Joan?"

"Leave it be. It's picturesque." Hendrick looked at Worrand. "What's important is that Mrs. Worrand here knows how you can shift the whole camp fast. Tell him, ma'am."

LYN stood half turned away, every line of her tensed in revulsion from the stench of massed suffering.

"The flights needn't be all the way to Aitangi." She spoke without expression. "I remembered just now that I saw a place where transports could land, if they had to. I flew over it this morning—a bit of flat land, near an S bend in the river. About fifteen minutes out from here in the Moth."

"I know where she means," Hendrick put in. "I had my outfit camped near there a month ago. There'd be four hundred yards of approach if you come in over the river. The transport planes would make it from here in six minutes. You could ferry your whole circus out inside an hour."

Worrand nodded slowly. "That's about eighteen miles. All the margin we'd want. Depends what the pilots think. . . ."

He broke off and reached for his wife, catching her as she swayed. She was light as a child in his arms as he carried her from the tent.

Monapu was in the doorway, stabbing a hairy hand at the sky. A crowd of natives ran past, shouting, looking upwards. Three transport planes were droning out of the north. Worrand glanced at them. But nothing had more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*Dear Sirs,*

*A month ago I cut my finger and got a germ under the skin. My hands began peeling and were almost too sore to work with . . . My wife advised GERMOLENE, and thanks to your wonderful ointment . . . I was able to carry on working. Now they are completely healed and instead of losing work . . . I have kept going . . .*

(signed) Mr. W.B.

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2. *Blisters turned septic*
3. *She applied Germolene*
4. *Was soon walking again*

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significance to him than the feel of Lyn's head against his shoulder, and the thin fragrance of a perfume he had bought for her long ago.

And now everyone was on the valley floor, and the last light was being pressed out of the day as Commando's mushroom cloud curved down. Grey figures loomed through the smoke, coughing, and put down their laden stretchers.

The transports took on their first loads at the top of the field, and turned with whipping propellers and a storm of dust to lurch downhill. The brassy echo of motors fighting for speed and lift washed over the cries of the children and faded slowly into the murk.

LYN sat where Worrand had placed her, under the wing of the Tiger Moth. A native woman, with a baby at her breast, had crept up beside her, and then others had come until there was a shivering circle of them. Withered brown fingers reached for Lyn's hands. She let the women touch her. For a long while, it seemed, she was listening for the planes to return. But she was calmed by the feel of others needing her.

Then the motors were hammering overhead again. The first of the planes was back, looming suddenly out of the haze to land.

Presently Worrand came over to Lyn. He was shirtless and sweat-streaked. He spoke to the natives in their own tongue. They slid away to join the lines waiting for the planes.

"Hendrick guided them to that field of yours. They say it's a tight landing, but they can make it. You feeling better?"

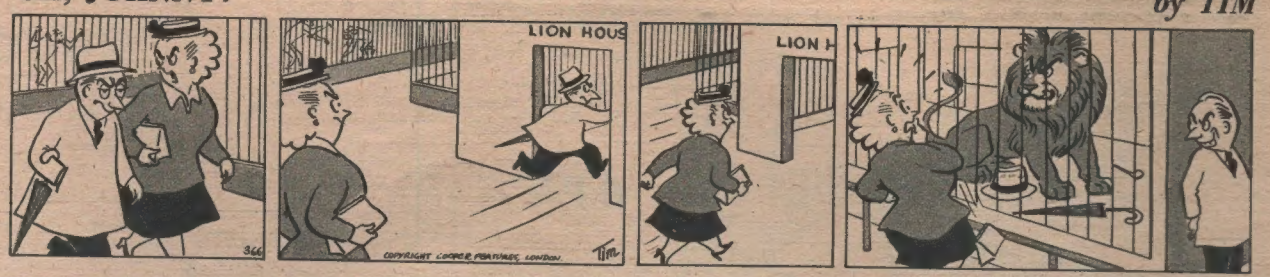
Lyn nodded. "After this, nothing will ever make me faint again."

He knelt beside her. "I'm sending Dessie and the nuns out now. I want you to go with them, Lyn."

"You know I won't." For the first time this day her eyes met his directly

## OH, JOHNNY!

by TIM




and frankly. "Now you know why I came."

The transports were taking off again. The first of them roared by, no more than a darker shadow against the gloom. Worrand touched Lyn's hair, smiled at her.

The second and third planes swept by, but the trembling of the earth did not cease.

Worrand put his arm through Lyn's, and drew her out on to the strip. There was thunder behind the ground tremor. A searing gust of wind brought rock particles, and burning twigs and boulders began to move on the mountain slope. One of them came into view, somersaulting down the edge of the field. It smashed the rudder of the Tiger Moth and pitched to a smoking halt.

Only a few figures huddled now where the planes had been loading. One of them rose and came forward, holding out a water bottle to Lyn. It was Hendrick.

"Why the hell did you ride back into this?" Worrand snapped at him.

"You want all the white man's burden to yourself?" Hendrick pointed to the remaining wounded. "There's seventeen left that can't walk, and Sister Joan and that sergeant of yours. That's more than you can handle if we don't get another plane."

"If we don't . . .?" Lynn did not complete the question. The creeping darkness answered it for her. There was a limit to what planes could do. Already, the small valley was almost hidden in smoke. The Range and the whole countryside was being blotted out, and there was no point of bearing, no light. . . .

"Light!" she cried. "They'll try if they see a light. The Moth. Why don't we burn the Moth?"

"Might help," Hendrick said. "If there's enough gas to make a real flare."

"Give me the gun off your hip," Worrand said. He took Hendrick's automatic and walked over to the Moth.

Lynn drank some water and returned the bottle over a handkerchief.

"Thank you. Mr. Hendrick, why do you dislike my husband?"

"Is that important to you—to any of us now?" He looked away.

"Are you jealous? About Dessie Rawlinson? Sometimes girls are flattered and fascinated for a while by an older man. It never meant a thing to him. He probably doesn't guess it happened. It won't matter any more to her, if you. . . ."

She broke off. Somewhere above the smoke cloud, a plane was approaching.

Worrand dropped a fistful of burning grass into the cockpit of the Moth. He stood clear and fired two shots into the fuel tank centred on the top wing. At the first spout of petrol, flames began to leap. Worrand ran. The tank exploded. A column of light shed a blinding, momentary glow over the full length of the field.

The explosion and the roar of flame merged in the deeper voice of the mountain. Invisible beyond the smoke, Commando was in fury again. A scorching hail of ash began to fall.

A plane was rolling up the field. The firelight reflected from its steel hull as it swung in a half-circle and braked to a stop. They worked then in a gasping frenzy of pain, lifting the stretchers aboard. In two minutes it was over, and the door was slammed against the torturing rain of ash. Worrand lay face downwards where he had collapsed on the floor of the plane. Lyn and Hendrick knelt beside him, steadying themselves against the hull as the pilot gunned his motors.

Hendrick shouted to make himself heard. "Mrs. Worrand, you were saying about Dessie. If I did something . . . ?"

The plane jolted, floated, and seemed for an instant to sink again. It gripped the air. They could feel the trembling but continuous pull of its climb.

Lyn sank back. She put out a hand to touch her husband. She smiled at Hendrick.

"You've got to be persistent, Mr. Hendrick. Some people are stone deaf and blind and idiotic. You've got to be very persistent. And it's tiring." Suddenly she was crying, and still smiling. "Oh, my God, how tiring!" THE END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## DR. BOMBARD MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE VOYAGE

*Continued from page 17*

to believe that, while he had proved that man could live for weeks off the sea and that the raft was better than a lifeboat, it would finally wash ashore with only his body.

Slowly and wearily he wrote his will—lying down, for he could no longer find the energy necessary to sit or stand. The days went miserably by. On December 10 he saw, about a mile away, in the usually deserted waters, a floating angel of temptation—the Liverpool steamer Arakaka, on its way to British Guiana. He sat up and began to make signs.

The ship hove to, and through a megaphone the skipper, Captain A. J. Carter, shouted: "Need help?"

Bombard's reply was the epitome of restored optimism: "Just my longitude and the time." He expected a reply of about fifty-nine degrees west. Carter's answer stunned him. "Forty-nine degrees fifty minutes." Six hundred miles farther from land than he had thought!

Feeling beaten, Bombard paddled alongside and a rope was thrown. He fixed it under his arms and was pulled aboard.

Captain Carter offered to take Bombard and the raft to Guiana. At first, Bombard accepted. Then, he says, "I thought of all the sarcasm and incomprehension that this would lead to. If I accepted, my fifty-three days of suffering since the Canaries would have been in vain."

He told the captain he would go on.

### A Snack—And Off Again

Bombard sent a message to his wife saying that all was well, and finally accepted a snack—a fried egg, a small slice of veal, a spoonful of cabbage, a couple of apples and coffee.

Then he set off groggily down the side to rejoin the Hérétique. Carter said, "Is there anything we can do?"

Bombard asked for a radio battery and added: "And please ask the French service of the B.B.C. to play Bach's Sixth Brandenburg Concerto for me on Christmas Eve."

Thirteen days later, on December 23, the Hérétique drifted ashore at Barbados. For ten days, Bombard had had to bail his craft every three hours, because a fish with a spiny dorsal fin had holed the bottom.

On the night of his arrival, Bombard tested his radio. He tuned to the B.B.C. French-language service and, at that exact moment, an announcer said, ". . . and so, Doctor Bombard, we have pleasure in telling you that the Brandenburg Concerto you asked for will be played tomorrow at 22.30 G.M.T."

Bombard had proved his point. With the right craft, a shipwrecked sailor could cross the Atlantic, if need be, and arrive safe and well. THE END

## *LIFE WITH MOTHER*

*Here is the missing person from the photograph on page 31. The boy is Richard West, seen with his mother, radio actress Gladys Young.*

# PRIZES value over £1,000 including GRAND EUROPEAN TOUR!

## £500 "Bullets" 1st PRIZE

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Your coupon is waiting below—exchange it for a £500 cheque and two tickets for the holiday of your dreams!

### FINE FOWL BONUSES

A fine roasting fowl accompanies each of the 20 chief prizes won with *Bullet* which was one of four or more on single coupon or plain-paper entry sheet.

## HOW TO WIN

To make a *Bullet*, add simply TWO, THREE or FOUR words of apt and original comment to any of the *Examples* below. To use an incomplete *Example*, first complete it with any one word in place of dotted line—then make your *Bullet* as usual.

**Add 2, 3 or 4 Words to any of these "EXAMPLES"**

Sunnier World
A Page Of History
To Celebrate
One Spring Morning
Juggler Butler
Forsaken
Fortune's Favourite
Truth v. Lies
Built On Sand
Why Despair When
Lagging Behind
Roar Of The Lion
Soon Spotted
With Both Hands
Smothering A Smile
Dad's Headache
Baffled The Experts
A Sitting Target
Looks Bad
If Fido Could Talk

**Incomplete "Examples" —see instructions**

Last Of The.....
When She's.....
.....Than We Thought
Should Have A.....
Can Be Very.....
He Can't Stand....., So

## "Bullets" Winners 1,876

FIRST PRIZE, £750 plus Family Coronation Visit: E. R. Dennis, 13 Curry Street, C.-on-M., Manchester:

**Turned To Steel**
**World's Gold—Devil's "Alchemy."**

£50: S. Hartshorn, 7 Clara Mount Road, Heanor: GATHERING STRENGTH—DOVE, WHEREVER *Baby* COOS.

£25: W. A. Campbell, 4 Knutsford Drive, Belfast: BRITANNIA'S FAMILY—ALL WITHIN "*Bugle's*" CALL.

OTHER AWARDS. £10: R. Ryder, 40 Ellis Lane, Frodsham, Bridge, Cheshire: IN BUTLER'S BAG—"PROVISIONS" FOR "*No* PICNIC." £9: K. B. Waugh, 30 Hartley Crescent, Leeds: PUT THE TRIER ON—METTLE, "NETTLE." £8: J. L. Steel, 27 Clinton Road, Leatherhead: HE'S GIVEN UP HUNTIN' AND—SHOOTIN'—SQUIRE'S SCRUBBIN', CLEANIN'—£7: J. Ames, South Park, Papworth Everard, Cambridge: DREAM OF A CURE—FOR INSOMNIA, FLOODLIT *Cricket*! £6: D. Harrison, 42 Luttrell Way, West Bridgford, Notts: FOR LOVE OF THE GAME—MY BOOKIE *Endures* RICHES! £5: A. Smith, "Little Acre," Layters Avenue, Chalfont St. Peter: THE TEACHER'S MORTAR-BOARD—EARNS LESS THAN "TROWEL." £5: D. A. Wright, 185 Chatsworth Avenue, Cosham, Portsmouth: MUM, THE MAGICIAN—BROUGHT THE *Housekeeping* DOWN!

For ten winners of £2 10s., see "*Bullets*" *Bulletin*. Winners of 50 Coronation Souvenirs and 1,500 "Good Shot" Prizes have also been notified.

## CASH AND CORONATION CAKES

### This Way To Win

FIRST complete Square in INK, giving your Answers to Clues below. Then, if you wish to enter *one* extra Answer to any *one*, *two* or *three* Clues, give each such word in full in "Extra Answer" Form below Crossword Square.

**Across Clues** **XWORD 833**

1. In great many foreign ones there are some people who speak English
2. Men making smash-and-grab raid at jeweller's want this
6. A goalkeeper shouldn't look this when he's let a goal through
7. In many parts of Asia, trouble is still this
8. Violent one fairly often hits the headlines
13. May result in uniting of parties or nations hitherto squabbling among themselves
14. There may be nothing seriously wrong, even if young puppy isn't up to it

**Down Clues**

1. Coronation time will bring special opportunities for one
3. Owner gets a kick out of entering his own
4. A restless one may not be so good
5. The duty laid on one may be considered unfair
9. A doctor's visit occasionally leaves a patient this
10. Slow movement may perhaps be accounted for by load of
11. What a toper really wants
12. Should unemployment spread, this will be commoner

## £100 XWORD 1st PRIZE

**AWARDS VALUE £25**

**among 1st Runners-up and up to**

## 50 CORONATION CAKES

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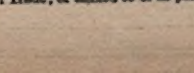

**Up to 500 "SIGNPOST" PRIZES —one for each 2nd Runner-up**

### XWORD 828 RESULT

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| E | 5 W | ■ | 6 B | L | A | ■ | K | ■ | |
| 7 R | I | | E | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | A | S |
| | ■ | | S | E | ■ | 8 | A | L | E |
| 9 A | E | ■ | ■ | C | 10 C | ■ | U | P | ■ |
| | ■ | 11 | ■ | H | A | I | R | ■ | 12 |
| E | D | I | T | O | R | ■ | O | C | A |
| D | A | L | E | ■ | ■ | ■ | R | A | C |
| 833 13 B | L | O | ■ | ■ | 14 | ■ | A | R | K |

| CLUE | EXTRA ANSWER | Total Fee |
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| No. | | 6d. |
| No. | | 1s. |
| No. | | 2s. |

*(Total fee shown includes entry on Square)*

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I enclose P.O. value ..... No. .....

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Address .....

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In adjudication, all Extra Answers will be read in combination with each other and with all Answers in your Square. Thus your completed Square with one extra Answer to *one* Clue will represent *two* full Squares (Entry-fee 6d.). Square with one extra Answer to *two* Clues will represent *four* full Squares (Entry-fee 1s.) and Square with one extra Answer to *three* Clues will represent *eight* full Squares (Entry-fee 2s.).

Single Square with 6d. P.O. or stamps covers dispatch to you of *Crossword Gazette* dated May 2.

Winner—sender of most meritorious set of Answers received—decided by Adjudication Committee on basis of aptness and accuracy. Ties divide. Entrants limited to one prize per Contest and to entry requiring not more than 4s. entry-fee. Signature indicates agreement to Rules.

## POST ENTRY by MON., APRIL 20 to:

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EX. .....

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**RULES** 1. First Prize for best *Bullet* received. Others in order of merit; the test is of cleverness, aptness and originality.

2. Editor undertakes that all *Bullets* received shall be accorded careful consideration by competent Adjudicators.

3. As entry-fee enclose P.O. or stamps as indicated on coupon. Fee submitted will be taken to cover *Bullets* in coupon order—any sent in excess will be disqualified. Plain-paper entries are full rate. If using P.O. make payable to JOHN BULL, cross /& Co./, write name and address on back. Coupons must not be mutilated. Forces half-rate for *Bullets* and Crosswords for entry-fees not exceeding 2s. if coupons personally completed and Service rank indicated.

4. Entries accepted by post only and on condition that results of this week's Contests (in *Bulletin* and *Gazette*, dated May 9, and in JOHN BULL dated May 16), also Editor's decision in any matter of dispute, are accepted as final and legally binding. Odhams' employees (and families) ineligible.

**(See "Daily Herald" on Saturday, May 2, for early news of *Bullets* No. 1,881 Result.)**

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